



INTERREGNUM APA

#30



EXPLORING SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY & ROLEPLAYING

INTERREGNUM

#30

An Amateur Press Association
exploring the wolds of
Roleplaying, Fantasy, and Science Fiction

Kiralee McCauley, Editor

Topic: "Forming A Gaming Group"

Interregnum is an APA comprised of zines written by individual contributors and mailed (or emailed) to the editor. It is collated and published approximately eight times a year.

New contributors and subscribers are always welcome. Just mail a check or money order, in US funds, payable to Kiralee McCauley at the address below.

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PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

⇒ The Deadline for inclusion in Interregnum #31 is May 15th. The topic is **Creating A Character Team**. Interregnum #31 will be mailed around June 1st.

⇒ The Deadline for inclusion in Interregnum #32 is July 1st. The topic is **Share A Favorite Supporting Character**. Interregnum #32 will be mailed around July 15th.

INTERREGNUM INFORMATION SHEET

Interregnum is published 8 times a year, in 8½"x 11" format, and is partially subsidized by the authors and contributors. Subscribers pay current \$2 an issue plus postage, Contributors do not pay for issues their material appears in except for postage. Contributors do pay \$2 a page for their work to be printed and included with an issue (if the contributors print their own material and mail it to us to include they pay only the postage to receive their issue). Sample issues are available for \$4 for non-subscribers and will usually be from the most recently available issue we have a copy of. IR is a not-for-profit publication.

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Zines is the term used to refer to an individual contributor's content. Zines may be sent as a pre-printed master or as a contributor pre-printed set of copies (Copy count is 65, but that is subject to change). Zines masters should be single sided for ease of reproduction. All zines should use 1" margins to allow easy binding. Fonts used should be generally not smaller than 10 point in size to facilitate easy reading clarity and some level of consistent appearance. If you include artwork as part of your zine, be sure that it is public domain, that you are the artist or that you have permission by the artist to use the material in this manner. Maximum pages in a zine allowed is 20 pages. If more than 125 pages of material are received for an issue, extra zines will be held over for the next issue.

Electronic Submissions are possible via the Internet or on floppy disk and we will then print a master on one of our two printers (Both 600 DPI). If you are using a non-standard font, include it the first time you use it so that we can be sure that it will print properly. Submissions over the net should be sent as Attachments, not inclusions, in email (feel free to ZIP them if you wish). We can handle ASCII, HTML, WordPerfect up to v.8, MS-Word up to v.97, and Lotus Word Pro-96). If you leave space in your zine unfilled, unless you ask otherwise, it will be assumed that you want the art editor to add in some nifty graphics to improve the look of your zine if possible (this is done automatically for all ASCII submitted copies since we will handle the layout). We like IR to look nice for the readers and reviewers. The editor will not change your wording, except obvious and blatant spelling errors. All Zines submitted electronically should be sent to: ireditor@mindspring.com

Conventions are encouraged to join our advertising exchange program. We will include flyers for inclusion with IR for upcoming SF/Fantasy & Gaming related conventions at no cost, but the convention promoters must accept a box of our own flyers for IR and distribute them on the freebie handout tables at the convention for us in exchange.

Advertising is accepted from Game Stores, Clubs, Magazines and Companies. Cost is \$10 for a full page B&W ad, which must be sent ready to copy and print. They will have no affect on reviews, policies, or priorities of IR. A maximum of 2 pages of Advertising are accepted per issue. IR, as a hobby publication, does not make any profit, have taxable income or even exist in the eyes of the IRS, and cannot fill out any tax related forms or documents.

Accounts of subscribers and contributors should be kept positive when possible, as we cannot afford indefinite credit on delinquent accounts. IR operates on a shoestring budget with all-volunteer staff, and needs cash flow to print each issue. If your account is more than \$20 in arrears you will not receive any issues until the account is paid.



The Editor's Soapbox

Cover:

This issue's front cover is "The Adept" by Jeff Diamond. It was designed for the Orbit RPG, published by 6-0 games, which can be found at http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Cavern/9447/Orbit_HQ.html. The artist can be reached at diamond@scwm.com

Its our first attempt at a color cover, and I'd like your feedback regarding it, how well it reproduced, and whether you think I should do more color front covers in the future. Doing color takes more time and effort, and is a bit more expensive than B&W, but opens us up to a wider range of artists and materials in the long run. In some people's eyes, color can be 'flashy', or 'commercial', but it can also attract attention, and present a more professional appearance.

Recruiting:

We need your help to get out word about IR, and to encourage more folks to write for it. If you will be attending a convention in the months to come, and are willing to help, let us know. We have flyers to send along, which you can put on the freebie tables. Our exchange program with conventions is now underway (see the last few pages of this issue) and we need to get the word out to other convention organizers. If you have a roleplaying group, show off your copy of IR and try to convince folks to join us - we need more talented folks to help each issue be a valuable resource for all sorts of gamers. If they think we're not covering something they are interested in suggest they write a zine about it. We need to reach folks that aren't hearing about us on the Internet.

Chaosium News:

The folks at Chaosium sent along some info about their upcoming releases for the Summer Gaming Season and have asked that we pass it along. They haven't sent us review copies of any of this yet, but hopefully they will when it comes off the presses.

Call of Cthulhu: Last Rites (CHA 2379) Four New Modern Adventures

Call of Cthulhu: Mountains of Madness (CHA 2380) Sourcebook for Antarctica

Call of Cthulhu: Masks of Nyarlathotep (CHA 2361) Revised & Updated Version

Call of Cthulhu (Fiction) : Nightmare's Disciple (CHA 6018) By Joseph Pulver, Sr. (Novel)

Call of Cthulhu (Fiction) : Mysteries of the Worm (CHA 6002) By Robert Bloch (16 Stories)

Call of Cthulhu (Fiction) : Shub-Niggurath Cycle (CHA 6004) Reprint; (Many Short Stories)

Eldric! Core Rulebook (CHA 2900) Reprint (ISBN 0-933635-98-2)

Eldric! : Melniboné Isle of Dragon Lords (CHA 2901) Reprint; Locale Supplement





More Chaosium Releases to Watch For:

Pendragon: Lordly Domains (GKP 2719) Reprint. Sourcebook for Nobles

Pendragon: Tales of Chivalry & Romance (GKP 2719) Romance Scenarios, among others

Pendragon: Tales of Magic & Miracles (GKP 2721) Scenarios (I think), or magic sourcebook

Pendragon: To the Chapel Perilous (GKP 6203) fiction, about reporters covering the grail quest

Topics:

Next Issue: **Creating A Character Team.** Do you want to the PCs to be a team. If you don't, why not? If you do, how do you go about doing it? How do you connect the characters, and make sure the connections make sense? What happens if the characters decide they hate each other? And what about teamwork? Should you expect it?

Following Issue: **Share A Favorite Supporting Character.** If you're a GM, which supporting character has been the most fun to play? As a player, which supporting character, villain, or sidekick, has been the most fun to interact with? Why? If your interest in IR is through books or other media, which supporting characters have been the most fun to watch, or write?

We're always looking for more topic suggestions for upcoming issues, both related to gaming and to writing fiction. Feel free to offer suggestions in upcoming zines!



The Sign Of The Dancing Priestess #1



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Forming A Gaming Group

Since I've never actually formed a gaming group, I can't really give much advice from that perspective. But I have seen a lot of them over the years. From my observation, gaming groups come from various environments, with differing levels of organization. These types affect how you gather and organize a game.

The most organized, of course, is the gaming club. For the most part, clubs supply logistical support. They provide a time and place for the participants to meet, and otherwise help with scheduling problems. They may even schedule games, or, if they are particularly organized, even give new GMs training. They also provide social contacts - a pool of people from which to draw potential players. In other words, many of the obvious aspects of getting a game together - attracting players, scheduling, etc. - are taken care of by the club. On the other hand, you have to worry about the club's bureaucracy, and about competing with other games and GMing styles. Successfully forming a gaming group depends on good advertizing, and a good relationship with the club's organizers. For the most part, GMing skill matters more than people management.

One of the most common environments for gaming is a smaller group formed within a larger organization, such as a school, college, or (rarely) church. Usually, the larger organization has completely separate goals, and often they are unaware of the smaller group's existence. Almost always the larger organization provides the facilities for gaming. More importantly, it also provides social contacts, i.e. potential players, because it brings a lot of people together for a common purpose. Of course, not all these people are interested in gaming, and finding the ones who are without offending anyone can be tricky. And it may take a bit of chutzpah to simply assume possession of an abandoned classroom. For the most part, forming a gaming group in this setting faces similar problems to forming one in a completely unorganized setting: Attracting players, setting a time and place, coordinating munchies. But the logistics are considerably easier, both for the group as a whole, and for individual players.

The least organized situation is the lone gamer attempting to set up a group, usually a GM looking for players. Most people in this category have sufficient personal resources to provide a place to game, but run into difficulties with other logistics. The biggest problem is attracting players. Even when a GM has access to advertizing space, such as a game store or the web, the response to this kind of enticement is slow at best. Most players aren't impressed with it. Word of mouth advertizing gets more results, but limits the potential player pool to the size of the GM's social network. Because players are so scarce not only does the GM have to worry about creating a cool scenario, but managing the personalities of the group. Unlike those connected to a larger organization, lone GMs are rarely centrally located vis a vis their players. And their players are often older, with more responsibilities and less unstructured free time. So scheduling becomes more of a problem. For these reasons, such attempts are usually most successful within a well established social group, often one that has graduated from another gaming venue.

There is also a distinct age difference between the various groups. Club members tend to be younger - usually teens to mid twenties - possibly because younger people are more used to structured groups and activities. Older players tend to form their own separate groups. They rarely belong to organizations suitable for piggy-backing, and they are sometimes uncomfortable around the younger gamers in more organized venues. This puts older gamers at a disadvantage, both for finding games to play in and for setting up games of their own.

So, how should gamers work to improve these problems, so that there are more opportunities for folks to meet,

socialize and set up gaming groups? If facilities, real or virtual, were provided, would gamers even use them? Or would they continue to isolate themselves within their own social cliches? Could Adult social organizations be used the way schools and colleges are? Would there be any reason/reward to create such a facility. And what would it be? Would it require a physical location? Or could it simply be a network - a way of connecting people together?

Experiments in World Design

I designed this setting while I was researching Aria, as a test of their method for designing 'worlds'. For the most part, I liked the result, and would probably expand it for use if I were a GM (for a campaign with a theme of cultural rebellion.) It is still very much a work in progress. Partly, this is because the book I was working with focuses only on certain aspects of designing a world, while leaving others untouched. Partly, this was to allow flexibility, so that a wide variety of users can adapt it to their tastes. Although I used Aria to design Jarshona, I've haven't used their system to describe it. Instead, it is presented with words instead of numbers, so that it may be used by many systems. For those who are *sadistic* interested, the Aria stats, along with some notes, are presented on the side. A short section, detailing those parts of the world I designed without Aria, follows the main bulk of the presentation. Last of all, I've included a timeline of the historical events relevant to the local.

Jarshona: The Country

Jarshona is a small country, a bit smaller than England proper, though not an island. Its people are insular, almost to the point of xenophobia. In part this is due to the necessity of guarding their lands, which are extremely lush, from envious neighbors. In part this is due to a historical accident (or divine intervention) which has convinced them they are blessed above all others in the world. They are bounded to the west by the great waters, and to the east and north by mountains. The southern lands, along the Luet River, form their weakest border. The country is split by a long fjord, the Zola Netra, with numerous small islands scattered throughout. A couple of large islands guard the entrance.

Jarshona is extremely rich, especially in the bounty of land and sea. Ancient lava flows assure the land's fertility. Prevailing westerlies keep the climate mild, and provide plenty of rain. Rare medicinal plants can be found in the temperate rainforests of the Sone Ver's coastal foothills. Upwelling along the coast keeps the fishing plentiful, and yearly salmon runs bring the bounty inland along the many rivers. The mineral wealth, though not nearly so spectacular, is still sufficient to the countries needs. As a result the people rarely need, or want, to trade with foreigners, one of the factors which motivates those same foreigners to attempt more violent means of obtaining Jarshonan goods. The foreign trade that does occur usually happens in the free city of Lutetia, or with wandering bands of itinerants, known as the Kari.

Jarshona was founded 336 years ago, in 624, when Jaire led the great rebellion against the Caldorian Empire, in the name of the goddess Ardana. As the people of Jarshona tell it, Ardana blessed Jarshona, and withdrew her protection from the Caldorians, so that death could claim Caldor, their capital city (in the form of skyfall - a small meteor strike and resulting firestorm). Although Jarshona, then called Allessia, was only one of the Caldorian's outmost territories, the confusion allowed them to seize the lands north of the Luet river and found their own government. The Caldorian empire, already in decline before the disaster, was never able to retake the territory, and Jarshona had no desire to extend the border beyond their traditional territory. About 200 years ago the Caldorian lands south of the Luet were overrun by the barbarian Horgath, who then

Aria Stats

Scope:

350 miles by 100 miles wide. Loosely based on Western Washington State.

Age: 318-336 years

Philosophical Orientation (Goals):
Equilibrium

Posture:

Active

Aspects:

Prevention, foreign invasion

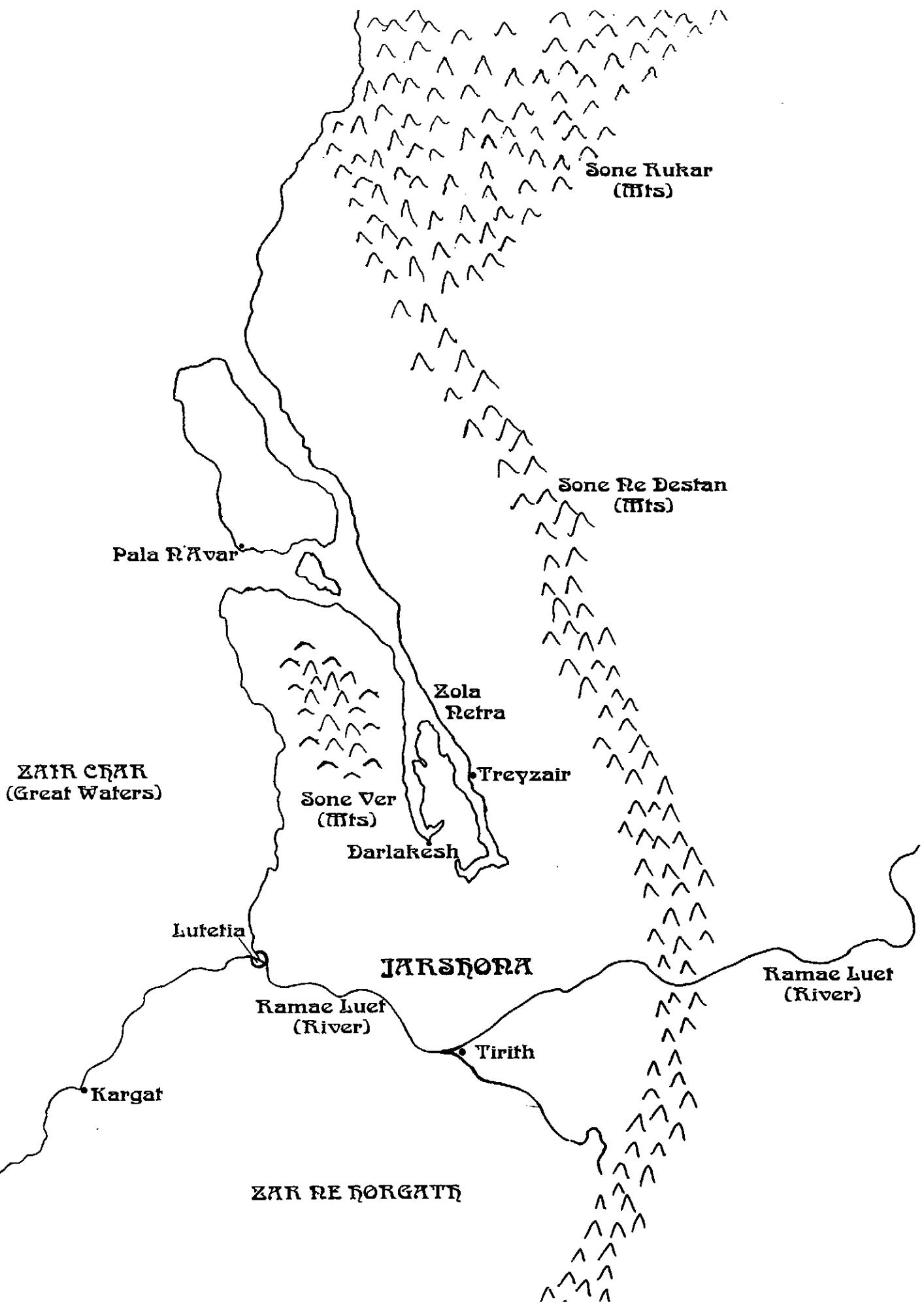
Conviction, spiritual superiority

Isolation (1=*remote*; 20=*open*): 8

Interaction (1=*little*; 20=*lots*): 6

Design Notes: One of the mistakes that appears in Aria's tables for random world design is that the older a society is, the less likely they are to interact with societies around them. It was my attempt to explain the results I got which gave the Jarshona's such an insular character, and led me to include the Philosophical Orientation Aspects above. I used the random generation rules less as I went on.

At this point I also sketched out the societies Jarshona was likely to interact with, at least in terms of their placement, philosophical orientation, and reasons/methods of interacting.



attempted, and failed, to invade Jarshona. They have been in a cold war, skirmishing back and forth across the Luet, ever since. The city of Lutetia, at the river's mouth, survives only by paying nominal homage, in the form of taxes, to both sides, and by constant diplomacy. Once they settled down, the Horgath quickly learned the arts of civilization, probably from the Kari. Of course, the Jarshonans still consider them barbarians.

Jarshona knows far less about their other neighbors. The Sone Rukar, to the north, are inhabited by nomadic tribes. The higher elevation and northern latitude result in a harsher climate, of little interest to Jarshona. For their part, the tribes are badly organized, somewhat primitive (although they do work iron), and unlikely to stray from the mountains which have protected them for so long. The Key Sylvaire - unknown lands - to the east are inhabited by the "remains" of the fallen Caldorian empire, now slowly reorganizing as a series of small feudal states. They are in no position to mount an expedition across the Sone Ne Destan.

Technologically, Jarshona is similar to the high middle ages. In part this is because they did not suffer as much from the political and economic chaos caused by the fall of the Caldorians. Advancement has remained fairly rapid, especially in the areas of armor & weaponry, and transport over water - as most internal trade is conducted along the various inland waterways. Recent advances include working cast iron, simple windmills, stone castles, canals, the lateen sail, plate mail, and crossbows. They do not have Compasses, Canon, Ocean Going Ships, or the ability to build truly large scale stone fortifications.

While Jarshona is technically a limited monarchy, the legal restraints on the Ojaire (monarch) extend only as far as lesser nobility. In practice it acts like an aristocracy, under a weak Ojaire, and an absolute monarchy under a strong one. The highest nobles form an advisory council, the Parlon N'Ojaire.

As with most "medieval" societies, kinship and bloodlines are important to ones status. The society is largely matriarchal and matrilineal - women are presumed to be closer to Ardana. Although men can technically hold positions of power, it is rare, and those that move in high circles tend to be advisors, rather than actually holding tittle themselves. Inheritance patterns differ between the classes. A merchant is free to divide her estate among her children as she desires, but a member of the aristocracy is expected to choose a single heir, usually the oldest daughter, to inherit her tittle and the bulk of her estate. In cases where the choice is not clear the church may declare a contest of Body, Heart, and Soul, between the remaining children, both male and female. The church acts as referee, and determines the victor. In some cases the designated heir may request such a contest to consolidate their position, or, in a ritualized form, as a part of their ascension to the tittle.

Trade within Jarshona, while hardly hectic by today's economic standards, is still fairly substantial. The country knows the use of currency, and runs a government owned mint (foreign coinage, of course, is useless). The concept of credit is unknown. Money can be borrowed, and in some cases interest is charged for it. But there is no legal regulation or protection for the practice, leaving those who engage in it open to charges of usury, and, sometimes, mob execution. For the most part, the exchange of goods is

Zar Ne Horgath: Land to the South of Jarshona. Orientation: Conquest

Lutetia: Port City at the mouth of the Luet River. Orientation: Peace (keeps their neighbor from destroying them.)

Kari: Wandering tribe of itinerant traders, like the Jews or Gypsies. Orientation: Seek Knowledge, (for historical reasons, and for trade.)

Sone Rukar: Survival or Equilibrium.

Key Sylvaire: Survival

Technology:
Material: 17 (*cast iron*)
Power: 16 (*Wind*)
Agriculture: 16
Building: 15 (*Castles*)
Transport: 17, except compass
Military: 18, except cannon
Miscellaneous: 14
Advancement: 3 (*fast*)
Assimilation: 6 (*average*)

Subsistence: Fully Agricultural

Mobility: Sedentary

Political Infrastructure:
Limited Monarchy

Legal Complexity: 5 (*Average*)

Kinship: Matriarchal

Lineage: Matrilineal/Cognatic

Inheritance:
Property is inherited partly (*it can be divided up*), title impartibly.

Economic Type:
Market Economy with restrictions based on religion

System of Exchange: Currency

Resources: 19 (*very high 20=best*)

Exploitation: 12 (*60% of resources*)

unregulated. Production of goods, on the other hand, is limited along religious lines. As Ardana is a goddess of wood and field, the church has much to say about how the land is used.

As they must remain in a state of constant readiness, Jarshona maintains a large (by medieval standards), professional, standing army, and a series of castle/fort defenses along the Luet river. Most of the rank and file are men, though women are not excluded. The officer core is largely female, more so as rank increases. The highest ranks are held almost exclusively by the nobility, who control advancement, or their close kin. The highest ranking officers have non-voting seats on the Parlon N'Ojaire, although, since they are often of sufficiently high status to sit as a voting member, the distinction is often semantic.

Although Jarshona is intolerant of outside beliefs, they are neither evangelical nor violent in their intolerance. That is, they see no reason to convert others to their belief system and do not seek to. On a personal level, their response to those who are foreign is to cut them off, socially and economically, rather than to threaten or kill them. (On a political level, of course, their response is to close their borders, which does entail military, but not personal, violence.) New ideas from within Jarshona are met with far more tolerance, especially when they do not conflict with established traditions. Religion plays a big part in their lives, and is the basis for most artistic effort. The other use of art is as decoration on more practical objects, such as furniture or clothing.

The people of Jarshona divide Magic into two categories, Life and Death. Life magic, often but not always associated with Ardana, is accepted, Death magic is taboo / illegal / immoral. Knowledge of Life magic has declined since the days of the Caldorian Empire. This is blamed on the destruction of the school at Tirith, but may also be due to a lack of interest in scholarship within Jarshona.

Jarshona: The World

Although they have no knowledge of it, Jarshona is on an rocky planet, with the same size, orbit, axial tilt, and general construction as Earth. Jarshona is just south of 50 degrees north latitude, on the Eastern edge of a large ocean. The prevailing winds and currents keep the climate far milder than, say, Boston, at a similar latitude (I know this from personal experience. It rarely freezes at sea level in Seattle, even overnight - perhaps 10-15 times a year, as opposed to the months of frost that Boston experiences).

The largest difference between Jarshona and Earth is that the planet is circled by a ring instead of a sister planet/moon. The various particles which make up the rings fall, sometimes destructively. Most destructive skyfall occurs in the equatorial latitudes, "under" the rings, making these regions uninhabitable, except perhaps to desperate bands of wandering nomads. It is less common in the more temperate regions, but still a well known type of disaster, like an earthquake or volcano. The timely destruction of Caldor, to the South and East of Jarshona but still well within the temperate zone, is a striking event, but not ludicrously improbably, as it would be on Earth. I have tweaked reality slightly in one respect. The particles which make up the rings are, in astronomical terms, extremely small. Thus, the probability of meteor strikes with planet wide destructive capacity remains similar to Earth.

I did not create either a religion or a full magic system for Jarshona. Depending on the level of "reality" desired, Ardana may be played as a real goddess, with a real personality and real powers, or as a function of the beliefs of the inhabitants. Nor is Ardana necessarily the only goddess. The Jarshonans could worship a pantheon led by Ardana. As for magic, the distinctions made between types of magic in Jarshona may simple be a matter of cultural definitions, or could reflect the underlying principles of magic. For example, it could refer to different power sources. Life magic could come from living things, being abundant in fertile land and scarce in the desert. Death magic could draw its power from the rings, and the stones which fall from the sky. If the abilities and practices of magic differ between the two sources of power, you would have, essentially, two different schools of magic.

Trade: 11 (average)

Military:

Professional Standing Army

Humanities:

This part of the rules makes no sense.

Hierarchy of Social Estates:

Concerns the status of different professions within the society. This was more detail work than I wanted to do without a campaign.

The Timeline:

Jarshona uses the Caldorian calender, which is dated from the coronation of Tanzer the Great and the beginning of the empires expansion. At the time, Jarshona was inhabited by primitive, semi-nomadic, tribes, such as the Garcon. The south, where the Rilkari ruled in Tirith, was more civilized. Already, the academy there was famous for its investigation of magic. The Caldorians first become a major presence in about the 190th year of their calender.

- 194 The Rilkari are forced to ally with the Caldorians, and allow co-habitation of their lands.
- 213 The city of Lutetia is founded as a Caldorian fortification, and quickly becomes the hub for their interests in the region of Allessia.
- 225 The Northern Territories are captured by Caldor and added to the new province of Allessia. Those tribes unwilling to live under Caldorian rule flee north. Lutetia becomes the seat of the regional government.
- 252 The leader of the Rilkari is forced to abdicate, handing over control to the Caldorian governor. He becomes the head of the academy at Tirith. The Rilkari, sometimes also called Ilkari, become an ethnic block within the Caldorian Empire, settling between the Luet and Rilkar rivers near Tirith. They continue to look to the academy heads for leadership.
- 550-600 The Caldorian Empire, though still intact, has become decadent and corrupt. Discontent leads the people of Allessia to look for answers in their historical past. Cults spring up, recreating the gods and religions of the regions original tribes. Several small uprisings are suppressed.
- 624 Northern Allessia rebels, lead by Jaire, a ‘prophet’ of the goddess Ardana. She predicts victory, and Caldor is hit by skyfall, beginning a long series of events which lead to it’s collapse. The first of these is the loss of territory north of the Luet to Jaire, who renames it Jarshona, after the tribe from which she claims descent. She rules as a charismatic leader.
- 642 Jaire dies, allegedly poisoned by the Caldorian governor in Lutetia. Fayme Lavon institutes and wins the contest of Body, Heart, and Soul to become the first Ojaire. She also forms the Parlon N’ojaire, sets down the Rule of Law, and resists (temporarily) increased aggression from Lutetia.
- 650-675 Caldor can no longer maintain a strong presence. Lutetia’s influence & importance wanes. The Ilkari, turn to the academy head in Tirith to settle disputes and maintain order, in essence elevating him to the position once held by his ancestors.
- 719 Caldor falls to barbarian tribes. This is of little importance in Allessia, but future historians will use the event to date the fall of the Caldorian Empire.
- 737 The Horgath begin to invade Lutetia from the South and East.
- 738 Lutetia sues for peace with Jarshona, in exchange for protection from the Horgath. Jarshona agrees, but demands a yearly tribute. The treaty becomes a model for the treatment/establishment of other cities in Jarshona, although the ‘tribute’ is referred to as ‘taxes’, and the document becomes a charter.
- 738 The Horgath sweep into southern Allessia. Tirith and the academy burn. The Academy head survives, leading the surviving Ilkari into hiding in the Sone Ne Destan. The Horgath continue to attack northward, into Jarshona.
- 743 After intensive fighting the Horgath are forced to retreat back below the Luet river. Lutetia remains free, and begins rebuilding. Skirmishes continue, and remain common between the two countries.
- 745 The Horgath establish Kargat as their capital city. The Jarshonans call their territory Zar Ne Horgath, literally ‘Country of the Horgath’.

- 751 The trading caravans of the Kari appear for the first time. Somehow they arrange for the right, in perpetuity, to travel though Jarshona, with the current Ojaire. It is rumor that this is the result of a trade, but it is unclear what the Ojaire received in return. The Kari are known to trade knowledge as well as goods, and many legends spring up about them.
- 792 In secret negotiations Lutetia agrees to pay tribute to Zar Ne Horgath to prevent invasion. The treaty is modeled on the previous one with Jarshona. When Jarshona finds out about the deal, Lutetia claims they have not violated the terms of the Treaty of 738, (it didn't forbid future deals with the Horgath) and agrees to continue paying tribute to Jarshona. Jarshona agrees, but from this point on Lutetia is treated more as a separate power than a conquest of either nation. Officially, they do not have any military force of their own, but the major trading houses employ mercenaries to protect their interests.
- 960 The current year. Recent events should depend on the direction of a particular campaign.
-
-

Comments IR #29

Rich Staats (The Guest #20): I enjoyed your chaosium reviews quite a bit, especially the fact that you gave them different ratings for different potential users. But I'm curious about their usefulness to players of other games besides Call of Cthulhu. I don't play in the Cthulhu mythos (with the possible exception of dreamlands) but many of Chaosium's products for the game are excellent source material for adaption to other games. For example, one of the Arkham products we got, which added a nice touch to our Night Watch setting.

Regarding your comment to Chris Aylott, I agree that the Bible (or at least the New Testament) doesn't generally recommend the use of any violence. But I wouldn't go so far as to say it prohibits violence outright. If it does not condone (i.e. allow) violence on some level, then an awful lot of Christian churches have fallen pretty far from grace. Things like the early conversion of Europe, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Thirty Years War leap immediately to mind. The attitude, while more subtle in recent centuries, is none-the-less present. One can, of course, separate scripture from the church, but not, I think, the religion's influence from its follower's actions. So, while the Bible may not teach violence, the Christian religion which it supports may be responsible for influencing violent action, through the words and actions of those who speak for the church.

Take the incident of the fictitious homophobe Chris invented. No where in the Bible does it specifically say that one should beat gays. There are, however, quotes and stories which condemn homosexuality. And some preachers use these to strongly imply, if not outright state, that gays are evil and should be punished. So, while the Bible does not condone his actions (a point which seems debatable among Christians), the man himself believes the Bible said it was okay. If one believes his actions to be evil, one must also conclude that the Bible, or at least the Christian religion, was, *in this case*, a bad influence.

This really isn't much different from the accusations made against role-playing games. Of course, RPGs influence fewer people. And that influence is usually smaller - it is, after all, a game, not a religion. But the principle of influence remains the same. Role-playing can be a very intense experience. And it can change people's behavior. Hence the charge that role-playing is a bad influence, often by the same people who automatically assume that Christianity is a good one.

It is my very strong belief, as it has been my experience in life, that role-playing games are an excellent influence. But I'm not blind. I've heard enough stories, and seen enough press, to realize that, *in some cases*, the opposite may be true. There are many people in the world with the strong belief, backed by their own intense experiences, that Christianity is an excellent influence. It disturbs me that many of them do not seem to have the necessary perspective to realize that, *in some cases*, it might not be.

There is a place in the world for sweeping generalizations - usually as the thesis of articles like this one. But I find such generalizations hard to make. Far too often in my life the answer - one might say doing the right thing - depends on the particular circumstance, and not some overriding assertion of what is right or wrong, good or bad. I started this article apparently in opposition to your comment that the Bible does not espouse violence, and that it

should not be judged by the few psychopaths who misuse it. For myself, I don't believe the 'psychopaths' are so few. (They not only include the loony tune fringe - like Rev. Einwechter, who uses Deuteronomy 21:18-21 to support using the death penalty on rebellious teenagers in an article in the Jan. issue of the Chalcedon Report - but the most vocal and visible of Christian leaders - like Falwell's remark re: Tinky Winky, or the Popes reinstatement of Indulgences for the millennium.) But in the end I don't disagree with your major points. If sweeping generalizations are dangerous, sweeping generalizations drawn from only a few cases are more so. It is better to be aware of the whole spectrum of possibility.

Dale Meier (T.F.T.E.U. #14.5): Sorry to hear about your CP2020 game. It sounded interesting, although I'd agree that individual turns for each player is too much work. I also find it interesting that both you and Scott Shafer have a preference for Star Wars. What exactly do you like about the setting?

Rebecca Teed (Fear the Wrath of Rocket Bat #4): You have so much fun at cons. Well, I have fun at the ones I go to, but when I read reports like yours I often feel I've missed out. Sometimes I think a con's success depends on who you are more than how well it is run. For example, one Boscon got a really bad report from Pete Maranci in IR. Another friend of mine thought it was the best con she had ever been too. But she was older than Pete, and knew a lot of the people there. Also, thanks for including a run down of who the various nasties are in your Cthulhu reviews. I don't follow the mythos, and have no intension of reading the original stories. But I do read most of the reviews of it in IR, and knowing whose who and what's what is a big help.

George Phillies (Refugee #216): Let me start with this issue. I liked Evaine becoming a banneret, and the reaction, at the end, to her killing the brigands. The fight was good too - in general, you are good at portraying action clearly. This showed the excitement of the fight as well, while still showing Evaine's competence and practicality. It's nice to know that the people she met were shocked by her ruthlessness, even though we, the readers, understand its appropriateness. I'm confused about the politics of the... Domain? Where Evaine was riding, and why. I know she is caring news, but why is it necessary to get the news wherever she is going. At first I thought she was headed towards a large town or capital city (this would make sense, informing the proper authorities), but this doesn't seem to match the description at the end. Instead, she seems to be headed towards another frontier - not one I'd heard of earlier. I find this confusing.

As for your writing over all, I have finally pin-pointed a problem that has bothered me for some time. Let me say that, in general, I haven't been a fan of your fiction, and I haven't always read it in past issues. I've haven't said anything, because until now I haven't had a good reason to explain why. Anytime I looked at a particular aspect of your writing - your descriptions, or actions sequences, or your characters - I found that it was well done. I thought it was pointless to complain about your writing, without giving you some way to improve it.

All, or most, of your characters use the same diction. They all speak and think the same way. The character's diction also matches the diction of the narration, that is they speak and think the same way as the author. Diction is one the ways to differentiate one character from another, and from the author, and to do the work of characterization. When all the characters sound alike, they all seem to have the same personality. It is hard to tell them apart.

According to the concise OED, diction is "the choice of words or phrases in speech or writing." Your voice, which all your characters seem to use, has the following qualities:

- 1) The appropriate use of large, complex, words (they do not, however, use long words for the sake of using them - only as needed).
- 2) Long sentences, with complex (and sometimes unusual) grammatical construction .
- 3) Precise phrasing (as when the invaders talk about the competence of the female warrior they're facing, and always add the qualification "even though they're women").
- 4) Objective, rarely employing metaphors or other subjective and emotional descriptions.
- 5) Logical, attempting to deduce hidden outcomes and facts from known circumstances, or to argue between different possible actions on logical rather than emotional grounds
- 6) Constantly Evaluating, and reevaluating the situation.

From the fact that you use this diction so often, I suspect that it is part of your voice as an author. You employ its strengths very well by writing a largely tactical story. Tactics require precise, objective, logical thinking, and a

constant reevaluation of the situation as new facts are discovered, and so fit this voice particularly well. It is also an excellent voice for the narration of action. I have never been confused about what is going on, the situations that your characters find themselves in, or what they are attempting and why.

However, it has weaknesses as well, and you should be aware of them. Because it's complex, and because you sometimes use odd forms of grammar, it is inaccessible to some readers, and this may hurt your chances of publication. It is also the perfect form for expository writing - so much so that it seems to tell the story, rather than showing it to the audience.

Let me try and explain this with a couple of examples from your own writing, one where this voice fails, and another where it succeeds. The first is from your story about Elaine, when she is on the beach after her fight with Pyrrin. She is trying to deal with what Pyrrin has done to her mind, and the emotional turmoil is extensively narrated. But we never seem to experience the turmoil. We are told what happens, rather than seeing it for ourselves.

The second is your short story "Detour". A great deal of the stories conflict and interest derive from the fact that the main character appears to be a child, but is, in all respects but one, as mature and knowledgeable as an adult. We are told this, along with the reason why. But what makes the story work is that we are shown this as well. We are shown that she appears to be a child, because the crew reacts to her as one. We are shown that she is mature because of the way she thinks - logically, objectively, using complex words and grammar and precise evaluations. No child thinks this way.

In your current story, "The One World", you have again focused on your style's strengths. It is, of course, a tactical story. And, your voice is appropriate to most of the main characters among the defenders. Moreover, the fact that they all sound the same shows a certain cultural solidarity (especially appropriate since all, or most, are associated with the military.) The tendency towards constant reevaluation is a nice touch, since the military is obviously trained to do so - it's part of the bannerets position. However, the invaders should sound different, and it would be nice if the townspeople sounded a bit different too. For example, the innkeepers daughter could use emotional, rather than logical, arguments when trying to convince Evaine to eat. But this is a minor detail. The real problem is the invaders, who should sound different from the defenders.

Since tactical discussions require a lot of the points covered by your natural voice - they must be objective, precise, and logical evaluations - you will have to depend on grammar to change the invaders voice. I would suggest shorter sentences. Less use of long, complex, adjectives and adverbs. More use of strong, specific, verbs. I haven't really looked at your use of active vs. passive voice, but I would suggest that the invaders tend to use an active voice, while the defenders are more likely to use the passive.

Tim Emrick (The Scribbling Unicorn #ç): I'm not much of a fan of 'Disney' style animated films, mostly because its, well, Disney. They have a rather puritanical reputation, and recent films have done little to counter it. I watch them sometimes, especially when they are popular, because it's a good gauge of where the culture is going. For better or for worse, Disney is one of the myth-makers.

I thought Anastasia was an interesting phenomenon, but haven't been able to see it yet. I'm glad that Disney got some competition. They definitely need it. But I'm not sure that the myth's they're making are any more palatable. The film is so much in the style of Disney, that I'm not sure there is any real difference. I'm interested to see how this plays out in future films - I certainly hope Dan Bluth keeps making them. And I hope I'll find time to see Anastasia someday too. This is hard, because none of my friends have a taste for Disney style animation, and I prefer not to go to the movies alone.

Re: topics. I will certainly have to do something on "Gods/religion" in the future, I'm not sure what. Also on building and personalizing characters - since that's of perennial interest. --

David Dickie (Notes From A Caffeine Based Lifeform #15): I'm never sure how to respond to Kethem, whether as fiction or a campaign. What would you prefer? As for being able to publish professionally, you are, in one sense, correct. I don't think the installments of the Ketham campaign are structured in a way that professional editors would accept - i.e. there is no definite beginning, middle, and end. Also, character development is not tied to the

plot structure. That is the major epiphanies don't often come at dramatic / climactic plot points. But this is the result of your medium. Ketham is a roleplaying game, not a novel. I don't know if you could structure your writing as a novel successfully, which George can obviously do. But if you could, I think the resulting work would have at least as good a chance of publication, perhaps more. Your writing is accessible, vivid, and as logical as it needs to be. George's voice, on the other hand, is inaccessible and heavily expository (not the best thing for fiction). This may be why he has so much bad luck with publication. In the pages of IR, of course, it makes less difference whether you use the structure of a novel or a roleplaying game. Hence my comment that I prefer Kethem.

Sorry about the formatting mistake, reversing the second and third pages. I enjoyed the installment as usual. I wasn't too disturbed by the developments with Glorm and El Sid (it was in character), but I'm a little disappointed with Krinn's reaction. Also, I'd worry a little bit about El Sid's player, as there are some things about his justification of El Sid's actions that I could argue with.

Dale Meier (T.F.T.E.U. #15): Re: Fahrenheit 451. When you told, "Civilization is going downhill, and burning all the books, and you can choose a single book to try to save it, which book do you choose?" The most common reaction is to choose a book containing the secrets of the great technological achievements of our civilization. To us, knowledge, and the value you of knowledge, is expressed by the power technology gives us to control the world. But, of course, that isn't what Bradbury was talking about at all. In Fahrenheit 451, the value of knowledge is expressed by the power it gives us to understand the world. And the books which are most effective - the best choices to save - aren't technical manuals at all. One of the questions that Pete asked was whether we would consider roleplaying material at all. My first response is yes, because I find that roleplaying is one of best ways to learn about and understand the world. But, all of the books are technical manuals... They don't really contain the heart and soul of roleplaying, just the rules on how to do it. Which leaves me in the rather ridiculous position of saying that the book I would choose to save is ... something... like... well ... IR - No, that can't be right.

I like your modifications to COC. However, I think that their effect upon the system is extreme enough that it is essentially a different game. Not that this is a bad thing. I don't play COC, precisely because of the nihilistic attitude. (I don't like games whose major theme is, "You're Doomed"). Your modifications change the theme, giving the PCs a real cause to fight for, and a chance to actually do some good. I also thought they were well done - simple to understand, and creating appropriate affects. Although powerful enough to give the PCs a chance, they didn't unbalance the game, so there is still place for "uncommon valor and heroism."

Thank you for the explanation of Christian gaming, and for "The Adventure of Whispering Hill," which I assume is an example. I liked the scenario, but wonder if it could be expanded, allowing the characters to find out what they have done after the chalice is stolen, and attempt to put it right. Presumably, this would require some sort of atonement for their sins, or proof that they had learned their lesson, and could resist the temptations offered. I'm not sure which exactly would be appropriate, if either. Expanding the scenario would let you tell the legend of the hill, without either giving the plot away or being anti-climatic. Which would be nice. It's a good story, and it sort of gets thrown away in the scenario at present.

David Dunham (The Reading Companion #11): I find your campaign is interesting because of the speed that time passes in game. In almost all of the games I play in, game time passes far more slowly than real time. Here, the opposite occurs. One thing I find confusing though. It's been a while since the PCs were introduced, and I'm having a hard time keeping track of who they are.

Collie Collier (Firestarter #12): Re: Your comments to Chris Aylott on organized religion. I've sometimes wondered if it doesn't also serve a purpose, particularly where there is a separation of church and state, and therefore of moral and legal ideals. In sociology, of course, there is deviant and normal / acceptable behavior, and legal or moral ideals are both examples of acceptable behavior. But, of course, they are slightly different. You can argue against bad religious behavior on legal grounds, and against bad laws on moral grounds, without putting yourself outside of acceptable social behavior. It encourages people to think about what they are doing, and not just follow blindly. But it only works where religion, which defines moral behavior for most people, has a sufficient following among the populous. And I think that can only happen if the religion is organized.

The Guest #22
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<http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/9329/>

Greetings faithful IR contributors and readers!

Much to discuss and some regrets in this issue!

First, congratulations, laude, and honor to Kiralee (assisted by Joe) for getting IR back into publication! Mia culpe – I flat ran out of time to include and edit reviews of the other zines in the last IR. ☹ I will try to do better in future issues. (I've been going about 18 hours per day over the last few weeks – your tax dollars are being put to good use!) ☺

A Brief History of Time

There have been many events on the Staats' side since my last input to IR. My campaign group enters its second consecutive year as a group, and the campaign enters its twentieth year as an entity. (Check out its progress at my web site!)

My three children are doing fine and are participating actively in all aspects of the gaming group. A little boasting from the single dad side – all the goomers made the honor roll, and all are now in the local gifted and talented program. *Since mom left the house four years ago, the kids have had a steady improvement in outlook, performance, and joy in general. We did have to take her to court for trespassing and theft last fall, but, minus her default on child support, things have been quiet since then.* This leads to the next major announcement.

My days as a single dad are soon over. I'll be marrying Dr. Jessica Maybar on April 17, 1999. By the time you read this, I'll be back in a state of nuptial bliss.

Joe and Kiralee said that they were going to use some Widdershins cartoons this issue. Glad to hear it!

On to the topic at hand ...

Forming a Gaming Group

Analysis

The first step in forming a gaming group is analysis. Determine: what games you want to play, for what purpose, how often you would like to play, and how often you are likely to be able to play. Performing this first step accomplishes several things for you.

The analysis helps you to manage your own expectations. If you're only looking for Dangerous Journey TM, female players between 16 and 18 years of age then you are also likely to be disappointed or have a very long wait. At the other extreme, if you are willing to play anything involving dice, paper, or cards, and you are attending a gaming "Mecca" university like UW Madison or U. Chicago then you will likely find a gaming group quite quickly.

The analysis allows you to effectively target potential player pools. Gaming is a broad area, and not all gaming groups are created equally. The groups that frequent miniature shops are quite different than the usual crowd in a typical internet chat room.

Your analysis lets you objectively consider your goals and potentially modifying them if those goals are unrealistic. You may initially be looking for a serious campaign with a rich background, great mechanics, and a core of faithful regulars. Realistically though, these kinds of campaigns require a lot of emotional energy and time. If your family and work only let you play for about 90 minutes every five weeks then you might consider Dragon Dice TM or Magic the Gathering TM instead of the serious campaign.

Techniques for finding or putting a group together

There are only two ways to become involved in a gaming group. Either you have to join an existing group or you have to form a new one.

Finding an existing group

Gaming groups, by and large, don't advertise in national publications or take out advertising spots during the Super Bowl. So, where do you find them? One place is the internet. Just do a search on role-playing. (You'll have to cull out all the adult sites that specialize in **other** forms of role-playing.) Another place to look for gaming groups is your local gaming store. Often these stores have space for gaming groups to meet or at least bulletin boards where folks can post times, places, and the games that they play. Word of mouth can be handy. If you have evidence that you are a role-player in your place of work, role-players may take notice of the items and start a conversation with you. Conventions are a great place to meet gamers! Local conventions are preferable to national conventions for the purpose of finding or forming regular, local gaming group.

Forming your own gaming group

The key to forming a gaming group is getting the word to as many potential, sane, compatible gamers as you can. You can post or display your information for the gaming group in the same places described above in "finding an existing gaming group."

There are some special cautions when looking for a gaming group. First, the world is filled with many kinds of interesting and unique people, some of whom are closet mass-

murderers, waiting for you to give out your home phone number and address. OK, that might be a bit extreme, but try to find some way of filtering responses. I use a bogus e-mail address from Yahoo™. If you are looking to put together a good, long term group then think of the process as more of finding a great marriage partner than as a race. Even if it takes a little longer to get the group together, you'll be better served by taking your time and finding the **right people** rather than just getting together the first folks that will answer your ads. Look for folks that will give you some continuity. They should be interested in many of the same items you are interested in. They should have the same level of interest in role-playing. (Playing in steam tunnels and making chainmail -- bad, bad, bad!) ☺

Now what?

Once you have the group together, you'll want to preserve it. You do this by having great role-playing and also shielding your good and faithful players from new folks who will disrupt the delicate balance of the group. Look for folks who already know people in the group. Also, think about doing trial periods with the new players. My current group has told me that we have enough folks. This counters my natural tendency to want to recruit entire counties of folks.

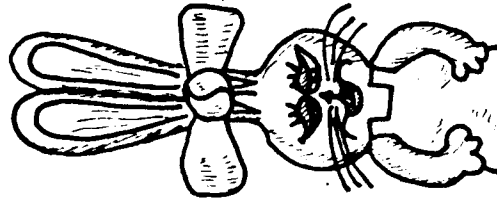
OK, I'm off on vacation! Take care!

Servicum tibi,

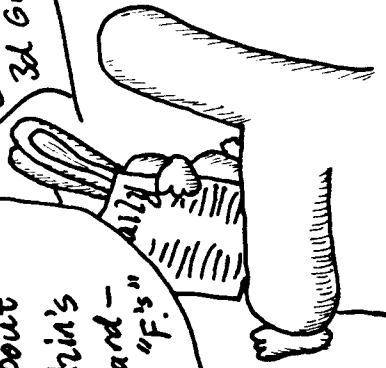
Rich



The Wanderings of Widdershins

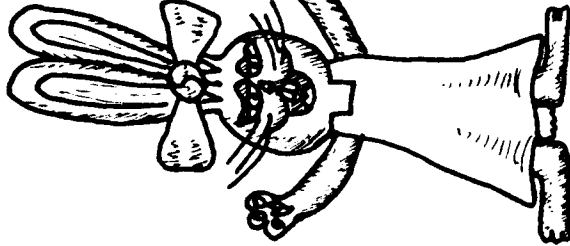


I'm a little upset about Widdershin's report card - straight "F's"

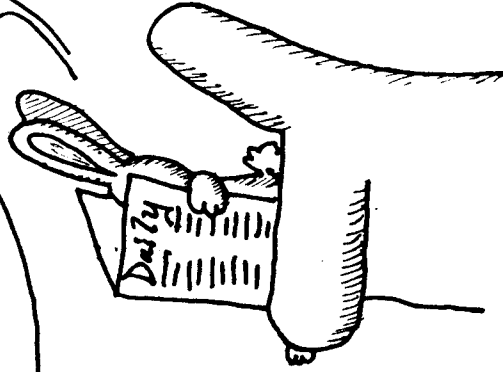


Aw, don't worry - Albert Einbunny failed 3rd Grade.

⑤



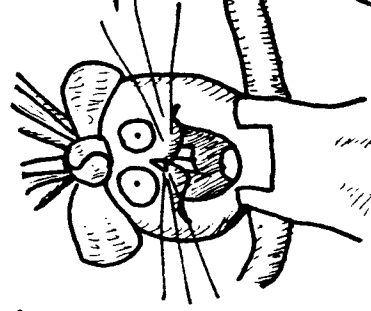
Wow Honey! Widdershins made the Dean's list!



It was just a matter of time...

⑦

Later while cleaning Widdershin's room...

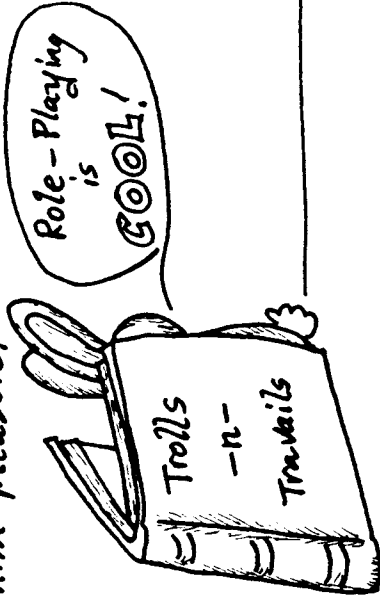


Oh my Gosh - where did I go wrong?

⑧

his mom makes a fateful discovery...

But, Widdershins did discover an activity which was social and brought him pleasure!



Role-Playing is GOOL!



REFUGEE

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This Shining Sea returned from DAW. They made apologetic remarks about the challenges involved in breaking a new author into the market.. However, they did not buy the novel. Good news. Baen took well over a year; DAW took no more than a month or two.

THE ONE WORLD

Roxanne comes visiting the North. She is supposed to investigate what ahppened that the Merecester defenses were swept aside, and see what the local response has been,

The squeal of brakes, steel wheel against steel track, brought Roxanne from an overdue nap. They had reached a final gentle downhill slope, the steel road following a carefully banked path into Noralin City. Flat, thought Roxanne, the ground is nearly flat, that's close to the flattest ground I've ever seen used by a city. Noralin did rise modestly above the surrounding countryside, the city being seated on a low rise abutting the ,, river, but it was scarcely on any slope at all. The steel road itself stayed on an embankment, a dike that implied the labor of greathands of women over a course of years to complete. Expensive, thought Roxanne, very expensive, but above all else a successful steel road has to be flat.

The passenger station was a small building whose stone columns supported a high, steeply tiled roof. Its scale remained out of proportion to the half-dozen disembarking travellers. Doors large enough for passenger coaches exited in several directions, promising not-yet-built branching road lines. Roxanne and Demara unloaded their trunk, surprised but not discomfited by the lack of porters. A kiosk in one corner of the station rented four-wheel luggage carts.

"Harvest-Time Inn is the best," offered the storekeeper; "tell them I sent you, for a discount." Roxanne nodded her thanks and resumed study of the map. Here was a Sorority Chapterhouse; there was the Shire's Senate building. The Inspectorate portolan promised a Tower of the Wise; it was actually indicated on the town map.

Noralin City's streets were lined with oak and linden trees; the city's age and wealth were marked in the width and flatness of its roads. At the expected street corner, Demarra and Roxanne paused to stare across the way. There should have stood a nearly windowless warehouse, placed and styled to remain

unnoticed. Instead, a graceful building was fronted by wide entrance stairs leading to a double door, large areas of window glass, and people entering and leaving. They looked at each other. They had read the map correctly, hadn't they? That was the location of the Tower, wasn't it? A carefully painted pair of wrought-iron signs named the roads; they were at the correct corner. They seemed to have reached a lending library. Where, then, was the Tower?

They stopped a passerby, a thirteen-year-old girl dressed in Acolyte's robes, dutifully carrying a peace wrapped ash spear, to ask directions. The girl gestured at the building the two women had been considering. "Ask at the librarian's desk," she declared. "The librarian knows everything."

Roxanne left Demarra with the trunk --- too heavy to drag upstairs on a needless errand, too valuable to be left completely unprotected --- and went inside. It was a library, posted signs promising the lowest book rates in Noralin Shire. An airy vestibule opened to a corridor of classrooms, a curtained reading room with several dozen children clustered around a single speaker, and the walls of shelved books and clusters of desks that marked the true library. The reader, noted Roxanne, was a woman. The cut of her robes said 'mage', which was highly unlikely, not to mention that the color was wrong --- sky blue instead of black and white. She advanced resolutely by the circulation table to the Librarian's office.

The Librarian was a cheery goodman of more than sixty years; age had faded his hair to wisps of white. His shirt and kilt were a plain gray, the simplicity broken by a sky-blue sash and matching slippers. He exchanged the blandest of greetings with Roxanne, closing "and how then may I serve you?"

"I seek the Tower of Wisdom," she answered, passing him her bona fides.

He looked politely at the engraved silver plates. "Ahh, yes," he answered. "Greatmistress Roxanne. Your presence has been expected since yesterday."

"Here?" she asked. How had he received word so quickly? The Torinsdale sunspeaker links went down at twilight, and she'd not revealed her destination until Obverse Second Recension.

"Indeed," he answered. "You must be tired from your travels. Would you join us for supper?"

"You are most kind," answered Roxanne. Was it possible to do anything in the far North without stumbling over a mystery? "But we're charged to visit the Tower of Wisdom, and may be expected there as well."

"This is \ldots, oh, I'm being absent minded." He opened a drawer, rummaged through it, finally producing a floppy, powder-puff blue kepi. A vigorous shake removed fragments of paper. A mage's cap, noted Roxanne, except for the color. "I, Michael-sa-Noralin-vrith-Michaelson, Blue-Hall-Mastermage and Chief Librarian of Noralin Shire, welcome you to the Public Library and Tower of Wisdom of All Noralin. There, you see? All is settled. You were indeed expected, our peers in the Hall of Night having sent word of your travels, so rooms were readied for you." Comprehension lit Roxanne's face. The Capitol's mages were all Black-Robes, who denied that there was a schism. They would neglect to tell her that Noralin Shire --- or anyplace

REFUGEE PAGE 2

else --- was in the hands of the Grey-Robes, or the Gold-Robes, let alone the Blue-Robes, a small but considerably more open group whose numbers included women as well as men. She wondered what this said about the Black-Robes' actual interest in collaboration with the Temple. Perhaps nothing favorable. More optimistically, perhaps the Capitol mages couldn't be bothered to remember where their writ actually ran, and where it did not.

* * * * *

Dinner was pleasingly late, giving Roxanne and Demarra time for a welcome bath and adequate nap. Michael-sa-Noralin's extended family, children and apprentice mages, shared a common table, their guests being placed where they could most easily be heard by their hosts. Talk ranged over a multitude of topics, from politics in the distant capitol to the rigors of cross-country travel. Roxanne compared conversation here with Dianasmere. Even allowing for the strange company, there was almost no small gossip; the focus was on civic betterment rather than personal profit.

The youngest of the children, a boy of nine, managed to sneak in a question: had Demarra, who lived in the remote North Capitol, ever seen a flijtschiff? On learning that Demarra had actually flown in one, he became completely silent, staring and drinking in her every word as if she were some strange and mythical creature descended on wings of dewdrops and moonbeams from the day sky.

Dinner, plain but carefully prepared, came to an end. The younger children swarmed to clear dishes; Mastermage, two senior students, and his guests retired to his solarium. A pot of herbal tea and blue-glazed cups awaited the five; the table was spread with a large map of Cismontane-by-the-Sea. Curtains had been drawn back to catch the sun, now low in the western sky; ceiling fans driven by a roof-mounted wind turbine kept the room cool.

Pleasantries completed, conversation became more serious. "I have onion-skin overlays," Michael explained, "showing everything - unexplained - in Cismontane-by-the-Sea and neighboring provinces this past year. Almost all the plausible - in my estimate - reports date within the half-moon before LongBeach Port was destroyed. There is also a manuscript."

"You've been most thorough," said Roxanne as she pored over the chronological list of events. A third of the items involved miracles - Manifestations of an Aspect, Healings, Beneficent Rain,... These Michael had noted as apparently not significant. She wondered if the phrasing were a euphemism. The archimagate was rife with heretics, Hunter-Worshippers, and agnostics. Another third of the events were unexplained thefts, disappearances of livestock and the lot. Vanished sheep were explained on page nine, which observed that the convicted sheep rustler had been hanged in Torinsdale at the end of FallTouch. The last reports, those shown on the onion-skin overlays, concerned sightings various characterized as ocean-level clouds, winged whales, and monsters of the deep, seen from the coast over a dozen dozens --- nearly three greathands, computed Roxanne, in real numbers --- of miles. The progress of the clouds north or south could on occasion be timed; it appeared that the unknown travelled no more than three or four dozen -- six hands of --

miles in a day. Unambiguous, high-plausibility reports of the unknown ceased after the LongBeach Port event.

"You are most kind," he answered. "This is my duty to my art. There is an unknown, so it must be described, characterized, and named. Thusfar I can only describe. Nor is there any reason -- except timing -- to correlate my unknown with yours. The historical precedent for your event is grim."

"The Warriors of the Sea?" anticipated Demarra. "They've not been seen in nearly three greathands of years."

"Indeed, they have been absent for a dozen dozens years and more. Before then, they were the scourge of the coast, so that every town was walled, Summer garrisons were large, and an occasional town still burned," Michael continued.

"Hence the LongBeach Port garrison?" asked Roxanne.

"Quite." The speaker was Aleanna Michaelsdotr, the woman Roxanne had seen reading on first entering the library. Roxanne had at first stumbled over her name, then recognized an obvious consequence of mages reckoning descent along male lines. No Black-Robe Mage had ever let that custom be noticed, not in her earshot, allowing that the Black-Robes used the same naming customs for women. "LongBeach Port and vale have a greathand of greathands of residents, enough to justify near a hand of armsmistresses for instructing the young. The vale had twice that number of armsmistresses, a militia that mustered and drilled on Newmoonsday, a hand of the Sorority, a kept town wall. All from memory of the Sea Warriors."

"Ah. Yes," said Demarra. "The mysterious Sea Warriors. Whose hidden capital keeps receding northwest along the coast, always just out of sight of our northernmost roads and villages. By now it must be someplace beyond the polar ice."

"Where else could they be hiding? It's the only explanation. Unless you think they were a political scheme of the Black-Robes," observed Morris Michaelsson, the younger journeyman mage.

"Morris!" objected his father, not quite harshly.

"Don't fear," said Demarra. "I recognize appropriate sarcasm. All explanations are unbelievable. But I don't know where Sea Warriors live, either."

"Here and now," said Roxanne, "LongBeach Port. The dead man was not a Sea Warrior. Nor, given his medical state, was he plausibly born anywhere in the One World."

"Father would prefer that I not suggest that he seemed too earthy to have descended from the fixed stars," noted Morris.

"His weapons were absurd," continued Demarra. "An iron spear? A third-rate ill-made sword? A leather jacket? Sea Warriors wore quilted cotton, used bronze or stone-inlaid wood swords, spearthrowers and dartblowers but rarely bows. Poor materials, highly refined technique. Beautiful workmanship. Besides, the Sea Warriors bathed regularly; he apparently didn't." Morris and Michael flinched.

"His accoutrements were all absurd," said

Michael. "Swatches of fabric were forwarded here. After \ldots delousing." His audience wrinkled their noses. "Hand-spun and woven fabric, extremely expensive. A green dye no dyer or fabric merchant can name or match. Boots, made by a cobbler who though left and right feet are the same. Wherefrom? Why?"

"There is a minor puzzle here," observed Roxanne. She pressed her hands together, fingertips pushing against mirrored counterparts. "One a Domain-bred Interlocutor would seem to have overlooked." Her companions looked penetratingly at her. "Here is a town with a good militia. They are attacked. They flee to the Temple -- understandable, walled --- and hide in the Sanctuary, weapons left outside -- orthodox, but not understandable, Sea Warriors being infidels who ignore sanctuary. Why? There was a quiet.

"Perhaps," offered Aleanna, "they guessed attackers were brigands. There was a brigand attack north of Merecester, only six hands of years ago."

"The anti-tax faction," observed Morris Michaelsson. Seeing his father's upraised eyebrow, he continued, "Longbeach shire politics had a big anti-tax union. Walls, a Sorority hand, armsmistresses: they all cost money. And time! Time not spent on roads or dams or mills or sewers."

"Or schools," interjected his sister.

"Or libraries," added their father, hand spread in the rising-crescent good-news sign. "Less competition this way."

"The LongBeach Shire Council sent a resolution to Cismontane Senate," Morris continued. "They called for changes. They said that if attacked, it was surely brigands, so they'd do --- what they did. They'd hide in Sanctuary, brigands being Faithful who respect it. This frustrates the purpose of armsmistresses and walls and Sorority Chapterhouses. The Sorority became annoyed. LongBeach Port had a wall and Chapterhouse; they shouldn't run and hide."

"The debate became murky," said Michael's father. "They walked away and ignored each other. Each side thought it won. We now see who had Her Illumination."

"Winning that argument was losing for LongBeach Port," said Aleanna. "Was it Sea Warriors, or wicked brigands, or what? Where'd they go? Where'd the missing people go?"

"The same was asked, daughter, of the prey of the Sea Warriors. They too are gone," noted Michael Michaelson, "vanished forever."

"Temple interests are more immediate," said Demarra. "The memorial from Dianasmere travels more slowly than we did." She glanced at Roxanne, who nodded Demarra to continue. "A memorial we share with you now, for it will be proclaimed soon."

"LongBeach Port is not unique. Along West-coast there have been a dozen such events --- all smaller --- in four years. Populations of isolated keeps and fishing villages -- really collections of a half dozen homes -- were found dead. Children, sometimes a few younger women, were missing. Each shire thought

'brigands'. When reports were assembled, odd brigand weapons, systematic death, systematic burning of books and art, sightings of winged whales were common elements. Every case lacked some elements. Once together, commonalities were obvious."

"The Southern Codominion," said Roxanne, "told us of a more serious problem. They finally told us. It seems that Sea Warriors, or their relatives, have returned to the Western Reach. Five years ago." Her audience froze. "The Outermost Isles of the Uttermost West are deserted, the population vanished, killed, or fled."

"That's three dozen dozen dozen miles from here," observed Morris Michaelson. "More," corrected his sister.

"This is very grave news," said their father. "The Sea Warriors never reached the South before."

"Dianasmere's interest is our coast," said Demarra. "Two hundred years ago, Sea Warriors struck inland, set siege to Noralin City, laying waste to all westerly. Westerly then was much less than now; Cismontane has drained people from elsewhere. Sea Warrior incursions took a century to grow from a double hand of men in a large canoe to a greathand of greathands host. There were hands of years of isolated homes being burned, no one suspecting it was not brigands, before they attacked a town like Longbeachport. This time, four years were enough."

"Very serious, indeed," the mage continued. "But why are you here? Of course, the Tower of Wisdom is delighted to guest you. However, Her Temple would have been the same."

The two women stared at each other. "A sound question. The Faith and the Sisterhood each have a heirarchy. Having us tell local Shepherdesses of things coming from on high will muddy the waters. I'm here because I was invited by Tomas-sur-Maserin, the shire Interlocutor."

"A very conscientious one, too," added the archmage, "not there's been a need for an Interlocutor. The province had two murders in five years, both solved before he could arrive."

"But he's very nice," said Aleanna, "and works pro bono."

"I am here," said Demarra, "to speak with the Sorority."

"On that I wish you well," said Michael. "They do as they see fit."

"Oh, they'll listen," answered Demarra. "Act} is their choice, but they will listen."

"Father," said Aleanna, "Suppose the Sea Warriors now do in four years what once took them a great-hand of years. From their first appearance to the first siege of Noralin City: that was two-and-a-half greathands of years. On that rate, they might be here two Summers hence." Morris smiled politely.

"World's not that regular," said Michael. "Except to Black-Robes, seeing regular in every thing."

"Pray tell," asked Roxanne, "How ready would Noralin be for a siege, if one came?"

"Now, that is my charge to know," said Michael

Noralin walls are mage-fiefs. They're maintained by tithe-holders: ours are pretty, hence in good condition. The field-crops without is planted in rose shrubs - rose-scent is a city ornament. Good arrowshot, and you can't crawl through long rose bushes. Empty space by the walls, within Noralin, is whittled down to the wall park. Wall park? That's how our grandfather arranged to keep the wall maintained. Wall park supports an inner embankment and park, open only to those who maintain it. Cisterns need repair; granaries are mostly empty - they bring rats. Grain is largely stored outside the city. That's fixable. City militia?" He threw up his hands. "Go through motions on Newmoonsday. Need a month to prepare, except the trained band. There's an artillery company: greatbows. Behind walls, equipment is plentiful. Be hard if you want archers - almost no fletchers or bowyers." He looked at his daughter. "Trella Trellasdotr and her son are excellent, but that's two fletchers in a big town." She flushed slightly. "Shire and neighbors have two Sorority Greathands: Lycoris and Lysimachia, Raven's Greathand. Lycoris lost a Hand in Longbeachport. They're not enough for city walls, and they'd need be other places, too, if the Sea Warriors came."

Roxanne and Demarra frowned pensively. What was here was not enough, almost any way you looked at it. Fighting preparedness against willow-the-wisps would ill-serve Sorority or Temple.

"Cisterns can be fixed, this Summer, in the dead months before harvest. There's a fee on water, relaxed to the poor. We paid for the aquaduct. Fee usually supports the schools. That's our chief vocation in the tower --- housing the poor. Even a Black-Robe deaconage. They all pay rent --- we won't starve, if we rebuild cisterns for a year. Shouldn't you; drought and town fire would be bad. There're those who'll work Summertime for not much: clean, reline, and fix cisterns. Granaries - Civic Council has them - might let them to rent for cheap to local farmers. They miss a profit there, anyhow."

The room had faded to shadow, the last bits of sunlight providing slight illumination. The teapot had been hung to its leaves. Morris Michaelson escorted the two visitors to their rooms.

The morning sun was well above the horizon. Demarra and Roxanne had eaten lightly, then dressed formally. Demarra wore her Temple robes, slate blue, the silver moon-disc and piping on each sleeve marking her Dianasmere origins. Roxanne, satisfied that the wrinkles had indeed shaken out, wore her dress uniform, bright orange with scarlet piping and lining, the four scarlet bands that proclaimed her Greatmistress of Greatmistresses blazoned across each shoulder, necklace bearing the eyed crescent of the Inspecrate dangling from her neck. A visibly nonbonded short-sword hung low across her hip. In most cities, private weapons went bonded or unworn, but in uniform she had to wear the ever-ready Left Arm of the Goddess. The scarlet cape and wimple of the Capitol Guard completed her accoutrement.

The meeting was in midmorning, timed to accommodate Sorority wardens, the provincial Senate's security

committee, and several interested bystanders. To Demarra's dismay, the locals were nearly uniformly convinced that Longbeachport had been attacked and plundered by brigands descending from the Northern Range. Her careful description of other events, some greathands of miles to the south, elicited no response. Nor could her hosts explain where the brigands had gone, or how they had managed to escape with prisoners without being tracked. The City Counselor did take careful notes on the virtues of filling the city granaries, observing that the granaries had been built, so Noralin City was losing money by having them empty.

Afterward the two women walked the perimeter of the city walls. Roxanne knew Demarra's brittle smile and soft tones masked a cold fury. In the entire city, the only thoroughly sensible person they had met had been a mage, and a Blue-Robe at that! Careful steering of the conversation with the Sorority House had won a general commitment to improve the training of the civic militia, and to ensure that the city's walls and outlier towers were properly guarded at night. After all, if brigands could seize and destroy a village, they might at least raid a city. The locals had had no counterargument to that. Contemptuous references to Longbeachport and its anti-taxers hinted at the underlying politics. The Sorority was convinced that the anti-taxers were at fault. Brigands would never have dared to attack a village that properly honored its responsibilities to sword and spear.

Noralin City walls were built on a nearly unique pattern: a steep outer brick facade was matched inside by a gentle filled-earth downslope, the town's main park. The outer moat was dry, paved for use as a road, and properly drained. Roxanne spent some time studying the moat's ends at the river. The moat was well below water level, at least now, and could be flooded, but excavation would be required first. Moat-as-road merited further consideration, thought Roxanne; it meant that someone had a real interest in the condition of the brickwork. Century-old memories of Sea Warrior incursions were kept fresh, so town defenses were supported by most of the populace. Under modern conditions, only outlying areas faced bandits. In the interior, defenses withered and city gates rotted in their tracks, where they had not already been removed for firewood.

"I spoke after with their Training Officer," said Roxanne. "The local Sorority does honor the Fall Dances, so the Sorority sometimes trains as a fighting unit, rather than only practicing to be pairs of constables in remote towns. There actually is thievery, and friction with the local Domains. Cheryl-sa-Maserin protects domain claims aggressively, though not unreasonably. If they aren't faking their records, regular training is up to standards - speed, endurance, sword, shield, spear,... The Sorority spends a lot of time doubling as peacekeepers, but staff is not a practical weapon for a formation."

"I think we have to wait for the Rescript from Dianasmere to reach here," said Demarra. "The right people need to work on Ravenscrag, get them to listen. Or hope that the next disaster will alert people."

The next year, the sea demons return to Merecester. Tomas has a friend visit. Evaine is assigned to be his banneret.

"So you are to be my Banneret? For my stay here, that is," asked Conyngham. His dressing gown was a mesh of thumblength green and black squares; the gown's fringing tassles were the darkest of black silk. He turned slowly in his chair to face Evaine.

"My Lady Joseline has directed me to be at your disposal," Evaine answered formally. She could hear Marilyn behind her, shifting slowly to the side.

"Excellent!" Conyngham radiated a burst of enthusiasm. "After all, I am here about the brigands and you apparently know as much about brigands as anyone. Perhaps more than anyone else." Evaine nodded politely. "Indeed, if I have followed Tomas's notes, you are the only woman to fight one and have the long end of the stick. Is this so?"

"I was hurt, your Grace. And there were three of them." Evaine wondered why he thought there had been only one.

"There were three. And now there are none. Only a mysterious horse, rendered ar-urvanya. An old horse, underfed, not well used. Not recently ar-urvanya. A mystery. From where could such a horse have come?" Conyngham stood. His dressing gown was belted tight at his waist. To Evaine's surprise, now that she could see him, he had a woman's trim, single-chinned figure. "Joseline assured me you'd know the old style of assumption."

"Yes, Your Grace." Her back straightened.

He took a roll from his breakfast tray, salted it, and handed it to Evaine. "I, Ramon-sa-Conyngham-brath-Conyngham, offer you the chance to be seconded to my service. In Her Name, I shall return my loyalty and wisdom."

Evaine could feel Marilyn stiffen. Few indeed were houses that reckoned descent along male lines. Evaine told herself that a search of the library was important. She realized Conyngham was waiting. "I, Evaine-sa-Orowan, Banneret-First to Jocelyn, Heiress-First of Torinsdale, do freely second myself to your service. My blade is yours. My mind is yours." She broke the roll in half, biting into one section as she placed the other in his mouth.

"In Her Five-Fold Name, so shall it be," he intoned. "Now sit, both of you. I had breakfast sent up for three." He sat himself, gesturing at the chairs. "No doubt the cooks think it is all to maintain the padding on the incarnation." He tapped himself on his stomach, not setting up the ripples and jelly-wobbles to which most men were prone, and waited for the girls to sit and eat.

"Evaine, a practical question," he finally

asked. "One I asked before. Are you quite sure you are not afraid of heights? There is nothing wrong with that fear. She Herself has sent it to us, to ensure that we do not absent-mindedly stroll from cliffs."

"Quite sure, Your Grace," answered Evaine.

"Have you ever actually been at a great height? A mountain?" asked Conyngham. Evaine shrugged. "Is it possible locally?"

"Tell him about mountains," said Marilyn. "You climbed one."

"Northeast of here, a day's ride, are a half-dozen peaks, the tallest being," Evaine hesitated, resetting numbers into a man's forms, "three score of scores of paces tall. They have cliffs, but with ropes and set-bolts, you can climb them." She would not talk about her trip with Gail coming North to here, she decided, not if she could help it.

"She did," inserted Marilyn. "And Jocelyn ordered her not to do it again, and threatened a thrashing on that order."

Evaine's jaw clenched. "Marilyn, the Heiress-First's orders are all to be seen as the same. It matters not whether there's a penalty attached or not. They are all to be obeyed, for we are sworn by Her Name," Evaine's hand

sketched a circle, "to obey."

Marilyn's face set to a frown. "Lawful orders," inserted the younger girl.

"Of course," said Evaine. "Besides, I'd already climbed the tallest three." She grinned. Marilyn swallowed. Evaine had neglected to mention to Jocelyn which mountains she had actually climbed.

"Good. Very good," announced Conyngham.

"Oh, I have the list I'd promised last night." He drew a page from his book. "Marilyn, be so kind as to run this to Jocelyn?" She took the page and vanished, the door closing behind her.

"I've settled the rest with Jocelyn --- the Heiress-First, I mean. The Republic has assembled its host around Merecester. I am going to spy out the brigand camps for them, and you --- you know the land like your hand --- you

are needed to come along, if you will."

"So shall it be!" Evaine chanted enthusiastically. The two continued to eat for several minutes.

"Your Grace?" asked Evaine. "I'm supposed to give you advice. That's what Bannerets do. But that's kind of hard when I don't have a clue to your plans. Torinsdale and the Sorority keep trying to enter the woods, but scouts don't see anything, or don't come back. Evaine frowned, re

membered Avis and Daphne, who had set off one evening, one never to be seen again, the other reporting she'd found nothing but quiet among the trees.

"But you send people through the woods," said Conyngham, "while we shall pass above them."

"Above?" asked a baffled Evaine.

"Above. I was dispatched here first. The staff ar-

rives this afternoon, to make ready." Conyngham sampled another cruller. "A flijtschiff arrives tomorrow. The next evening, we shall use the sea breeze to gain position, spying out the brigands on the wings of the brighter ascension." Conyngham hoped he wasn't being too poetic. Torinsdale lasses seemed astonishingly matter-of-fact, even stolid.

"A flijtschiff?" squeaked Evaine. "Here in Torinsdale?" She had heard of flying ships, one of the wonders of the archimagate, but never expected to see one. She had hoped, when she and Gail passed by the capitol, but none had been apparent. Supposedly one had come to Noralin City, fifty years ago, to mark the opening of the steel road, but a flijtschiff was so fabulously expensive as to spend most of its days confined to its shed.

"You have a mooring mast," noted Conyngham, gesturing toward Tomas's tower. "I believe it's nominally a farseer tower." The tower was sometimes called 'Tomas's folly', though never to his face; none had understood why Tomas had built it so solidly, nor why he had set mounts for winching gear in its topmost reaches.

"Now, the serious question," asked Conyngham. "Are you sure you are not afraid of riding in a flijtschiff? If you would rather not, I'll give you an excuse to be on the ground."

"I'm not afraid, Your Grace," said Evaine. Then she realized what he had just said. "You want me? On a flijtschiff?" He nodded. "Does anyone ever turn that chance down?"

"As it happens, rather easily. Especially when I tell them we shall be flying over the ocean out of sight of land." He waited for her response.

"I still want to go," she said. Memories of rules overtook her. "Aren't the magicians going to get a bit antsy about that? Somehow, I thought, well, that they only let magicians on board a flijtschiff."

"It's not a difficulty. At very worst, you announce me, I announce that we have shared bread and salt, and that is that." Conyngham sounded perfectly confident.

"Oh," agreed Evaine. She hadn't thought it would be that simple. "Wait. I introduce you? Surely, it is seemly that I be prepared to announce you, should it be needful. Your name I know; are there honorifics?"

"The only needful title is Flijtkepitan," answered Conyngham.

Afternoon brought the promised half-dozen wagons to Caer Adurel. They had as escort four Hands of riders, young, determined-looking women who negotiated with the bailiff where outside the keep they might set up camp. They then set to work unpacking the wagons, drawing from their innards ropes, heavy cloth, and bits and pieces of arcane apparatus. Much of the equipment they set up near the stream. From the castle battlements they hung long grey-black blankets. Sun-crystal, recognized Evaise. The blankets were layered with sun-crystal, more than she could remember having seen in one place outside of the Capitol. Heavy spools of black-painted copper wire were unwound, wire being stretched overhead hither and thither. The keep's residents stayed carefully to one side, available to

help if asked but otherwise letting Conyngham's staff

do whatever-it-was they were doing.

With the staff came a half-dozen men. The three oldest gave their time to supervising the unpacking. Mages, decided Evaine, these were some of Conyngham's mages, supervising the work of their apprentices and artisans. Conyngham himself diligently oversaw the work, pausing only to chat with Jocelyn and Tomas. The three younger men formed a loose triangle around the wagons, never in the way, but not offering to help, either. Evaine noted the peculiarity in their walk. They were thin, too, lacking a man's rounded belly, broad arms, and wide legs. No, she decided, they move as do the temple-trained, forever within their own balance. She approached the youngest and introduced herself. His first response was a frown. "I have duty here," he answered. When he answered he shifted his weight. He still peered out over the courtyard, but his weight had prepared him against Evaine.

Temple trained, she thought, he has to be temple trained. Turning, she made the casual hand gesture that named her teacher and shrine. He responded in kind.

"I walk in the Lady's Shadow," he announced confidently. "I stand in Her Presence, Her Name forever in my mind."

"May This Be So," she responded formally. "If duty permits, you would be welcome at our morning scrimmage. Practicing forever against the same people can be very boring."

"Truly," he answered. "But sometimes people get upset when things stop being boring. Or when they don't get their way."

"Or when the local champion discovers she is truly the --- local --- champion," added Evaine. "That's a little boy's condition. The SwordMistress would think me remiss if I did not invite the three of you." She gestured at the Caer walls, where Sword-Mistress stood watching.

The young man looked up and shook his head gravely. "If we were introduced, how is she named?"

"She is a Taken One," answered Evaine, "Given to Her Eternal Service, and answers only to title. She's very good. I count myself highly fortunate whenbeat her on the practice field, two out of three."

"She is indeed very good," answered the young man, his voicely oddly drifted to higher octaves. "But duty calls." Evaine bowed politely and withdrew.

A distant hum set the late afternoon atremble. The watch in the high tower looked up from a patient scan of distant hills, pointed at the sky, and let loose a scream that echoed from keep to parapet to moat. A silver cloud,

larger already than the full moon, bore purposefully down on the castle. Apprentices dropped their work and ran to the keep's walls, standing shoulder to shoulder along the

parapet. Within minutes, all work had stopped, every resident of Caer Adurel having come outside to watch the flijtschiff approach. The vessel turned once and again to approach the Caer from directly downwind.

Below, Conyngham's staff scurried to and fro, preparing the last steps needed to dock the vessel. The vessel coasted toward a stop, grappling the tower. Lines descended from its side, landing with a thump in the courtyard. Distant hisses and gasps could be heard from overhead. Tomas, who had seen all this before, was able to stand calmly. This sort of landing was something a flijtschiff crew practiced with great regularity, often under wind conditions far less favorable than today's. The hum ceased. Multiple cables, some taut and others freestanding, ran between the flijtschiff and the ground.

They go flying. Conyngham tells the defenders what is going on, so they lose the battle, but not too badly. The sea demons withdraw.

"Oh, botheration, we're landing in Merecester. Someone might not be satisfied with that. Not that I like standing on ceremony, mind you, but the Republic does, no matter they pretend to detest titles. Formally, not that I want anyone to be formal, I am The Perfect Wisdom, His Most Terrible and Awesome Presence, Great Mighty Lord of the Hall of Serene Night, Conyngham-bar-Conyngham-vrith-Conyngham. I have the complete list someplace in my papers. If you are ever unable to sleep, that list is better than any soporific." He paused. "No, you don't get to kneel to me! You're my Banneret! Besides, Evaine-of-the-many-names has no call to kneel, except in respect to her teachers, except as They," he spread his arms, fingers locked in splayed sunbursts, "elect to make a Bodily Manifestation." He closed his hands and cut himself a slice of apple. "An event which has not clearly happened in several thousand years."

The hair on the back of Evaine's neck rose. "Forgive me, Your Grace," she said. "But here I am Evaine-sa-Orowan, of no other names."

He inclined his head in acknowledgement. "So it shall be," he answered, "for the nonce."

Evaine saves Conyngham and the Zeppelin.

The Shadow blocked her path off this tower. "You saved His Wisdom's life," he announced. "When I failed. Your honor is my disgrace."

"I saved my own life," she temporized. "You were on the ground, miles away. No one can reasonably fault you."

"I am sworn. You have brought me to disgrace," he choked.

Evaine stiffened. The watchers around the tower were suddenly very quiet. Shadow-taught were

bound by intricate, ancient rules. Had she broken one of them? He wore his sword, but she was unarmed. Was he obligated to attack her? She shifted her weight slightly. She'd never used Three Hands Clapping against a real blade; she'd rather not try it against someone likely more skilled than herself.

"It must be said," he announced. "My debt is beyond reckoning. My soul is yours."

"Nandji?" she whispered. "That's really a bit extreme. You are very kind, but I really am a bit young. For that sort of thing." At least, she told herself, you are if you say you are. He looked completely crestfallen.

She hadn't realized quite how strong he was, nor how firmly she was holding him. Her pulse was pounding.

Evaine talking to garrison sergeant afterwards.

You didn't really expect me to,,,? Up here? With an audience?

But he was really cute. You could see how he fit into his trousers.

Just as well, said the older watch. That space is cold, narrow, and hard.

Besides, whispered the sergeant, the floor beams are a bit old, and it would be a nasty drop if a man and woman jumping - or whatever - up and down were to collapse them

Evaine fled.

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The next year, huge masses of sea demons appear. The one world sends an army — The Host of the Chakrosh — to destroy them.

North Capitol baked beneath a searing August sun. The city was half-deserted, everyone who could find an excuse to travel having fled to the foothills of the Taurine range. In the signal tower of the Great Senate, high enough to catch such breeze as existed, four apprentice signallers and their senior peered through farseers at distant relay towers. Only an occasional message arrived, to be carefully transcribed, wrapped on a message spool, and dropped into the pneumatic ground chute. It was late Summer, after all. With the Senate in recess, almost nothing was important enough to justify the cost of a relayed message. In the rest of the year, the tower would be manned by senior members of the Signaller's Guild, but during Firetouch a few juniors sufficed.

"North path," spoke Verbena, the oldest apprentice. She tapped on her mirror, confirming to the relay tower that she was ready to receive. "G-Q-R-V-T BREAK." Without breaking her transcription, she cursed under her breath. "Code! Master Thumin?" Apprentice Master Signaller Thumin was a boy a few years younger than herself, who owed his position to his pompous demeanor, his rigorous adherence to the letter of every known rule no matter how obscure or trivial, and his utter lack of substantive political opinions.

The youth leaned over the apprentice signaller's

shoulder, checking the code group against a slate tablet. He sat at his own desk and began to write in his tight but highly legible hand: "The First Speaker or First Speaker Pro Tem: Tower is receiving a coded message in the First Speaker's key. Message is tagged as being of the ninth (handth and oneth) priority. Thumin, Master Signaller." He shook his head. A ninth priority code was unreal. Even the Great Earthquake had rated no more than a six. However, the priority tags were designed for unambiguity. He wrapped the message in a yellow-orange emergency spool, dropped the message down the chute, leaned over the tower wall, and blew sharply on his whistle. In the sleepy courtyard below, a junior member of the Corps of Messengers - a girl of perhaps 14 - replaced sewing in pack, stood, waved, took the spool, and sprinted toward Senate offices.

Thumin began copying code groups from Verbena's record. He idly wondered what would happen next. The priority was clearly wrong, but there could be no error as to what had been received, nor what actions were now prescribed. Minutes later, a creak and groan marked the tower elevator gasping into operation. In this season, wind turbines needed a half-hour to rewind drive weights; either someone senior was coming to confirm his report, or someone would find themselves thoroughly switched after they finished apologizing for misuse of resources. He had not expected the First Speaker Pro Tem herself to step from the elevator cage. Nor did he expect the trample of feet up the stairs, three more senior members of the Corps of Messengers running to stair top to await the Speaker's commands.

"May Her Light illuminate you," Thumin intoned. He still remembered the correct graceful bow, a full Breaking Wave for the seniormost Senator.

"And you for all of your your days." The First Speaker was little given to formality, and held herself to the tersest of polite replies. She set a decrypting wheel in the coding apparatus and began cranking. Gears clicked and whirled. A scritch-scratch-scratch was the Speaker transcribing the message, one letter after the next. "Goddess preserve us!" she spoke. Thumin was startled. By custom, nothing was said in a signal tower save official or formal business, lest a signaller be distracted from her work. The Speaker knew that rule, and had broken it. "Goddess!" she repeated. The tic-tac of the coding machine ended. The Speaker pro tem looked at Verbena, confirming that the entire message had been received.

"Dorothy," said the Speaker to her first companion. "Go to the Messenger Barracks. In my name, mobilize the entire Corps of Messengers, even those asleep. I will dictate their message in an eighth-palm. Sieglinda, go to the stables. Have four, no, six riders readied, under arms and armor, black tabards and black kons. Move!"

She looked at the Signallers. "This is under Senate Seal. Say nothing of it, not to anyone, until the Speaker herself releases you. This shall be done! Kathea, come with me." She and the last messenger stepped into the elevator, closed the doors, and began their gentle descent to the ground.

"What was that?" asked Verbena.

"Something of which we may not speak," answered

Thumin.

"To anyone else," said Ilia Iliasdotr, shifting her ample frame to look more comfortably through her farseer. The relay towers in her view remained still. "We're not someone else." Thumin frowned. Ilia was always arguing with him. Recently she'd realized that he spent all his spare time reading rules and precedents, many from times so ancient that the alphabet was not quite the same, and had started doing the same, the better to dispute him. He put the improvement in her arguments down to his good influence.

"If we're not being spied upon," agreed Thumin, "you have the right of the argument."

"So what did the message say?" asked Verbena. "You were standing right by the decoder. You could see."

"Verbena!" grumbled Thumin. "Spy on a message? How can you say such a thing? Besides, the writing space is hooded."

"I didn't," said Verbena. "But you log every message, right? How do you log something you can't read?"

Thumin paused for a moment. "Encrypted message. To, From, priority." He opened the log, began a line in permanent ink. "Who was the from?" he asked.

"Tomas Cheryl-sa-Orowan," answered Verbena, "whoever he is."

"Interlocutor," inserted Ilia. "Northwest provinces. Made a name by watching Sea Demons win battles, and reporting how they did it."

"Of course," said Thumin. "Explains everything. But it's not official business." He stopped talking, leaving the four apprentices waiting his next words.

Ilia nodded. Not official business meant that it should not be discussed in the tower, because someone might be distracted from their work. She, however, knew the exception. "Master Thumin? Is it not distracting to us, to be left waiting for the answer, which you've said you have?"

"Oh, very well," he answered annoyedly. "Tomas is with the Host of the Chakrosh. Doubtless he reports a crushing victory, the sea demons being driven into the Western Ocean," explained Thumin. It was all so obvious.

Sonja Sonjasdotr, apprentice signaller seconded from the Sorority, grimaced. "Forgive me, Master, but great victories are always been sent uncoded, so all may rejoice at the Revelation of Her Shielding Grace. Black tabards are for messengers announcing disaster."

"Good point on coding," acknowledged Thumin. "And Horse messengers are not a Guild procedure. Perhaps the Sea Demons ran away before battle - that would be a disaster. They haven't been killed yet. Of course Tomas whoever could have done something foolish, sending a message inappropriately. Clients do such things, and we must bear with them." He nodded knowingly.

The Lower Court of the Great Senate was paved in polished limestone, lined with waterchannels and intricate small waterfalls whose babbling and hissing masked background noise. The Corps of Messengers waited in irregular ranks, additional Messengers gradually arriving and assembling at the rear. Six Guardians of the Lance stood to one side, horses behind them, squires dutifully helping them into their last pieces of armor. The First Speaker spoke quietly, informing each of the six of their destinations.

"\ldots Viella, you will ride to Dianasmere. Margarethe, you will take the message first to the Black-Robe Magekeep in the capitol and then ride to the Archmage Himself, in the Halls of Night or wherever he is to be found. Be not surprised when the Mages greet you and already know your message. Mysterious are the ways of the Mages." The women nodded. "Now I must prepare the girls. Your scribes will make your copies." At one of the square, facing the assembling Messengers, was a statue of Her Aspect As Maiden, seated, an outstretched palm and hand forming a ccccc from which the Messengers could be addressed. The First Speaker slowly climbed the stairs, the importance of the moment almost overwhelming her, and thrice sounded the small gong that hung from Her Thumb.

Message: The Host of the Chakrosh "\ldots" she paused, telling herself the pause was to let the Messengers write, when actually she was speaking for dramatic effect, knowing that her speech here would earn her a place in the history books. "has been... crushed... by the Sea Demons. Merecester is besieged and will soon fall. Noralin City is open to attack. For the Dead and the Living, I beseech the aid and succour of the Great Senate, may Her Wisdom Guide Them Forever.

Tomas Cheryl-sur-Maserin, Interlocutor-General, Province of CisMontane-by-the-Sea.

To the First Speaker Pro Tem's pleased surprise, only four messengers had fainted in their tracks.

Roxanne eventually gets control of what is left of the army and scores a victory. She is dragged back to the capitol. She and Dorothy, and Evaine as escort are attacked in a narrow street at night by two greathands of the Capital Guards, who do really poorly against Evaine.

Evaine kills more or less all of them, with some help, and reaches the end of the alley. A figure stands in the square by the fountain.

A figure waited in the plaza beyond the arcade. It stood with its back to the weak lamplight, its face in shadow. A chain-scythe was lovingly cradled in its arms.

Evaine paused. Her breath was deep and regular. "Mistress?" she whispered. "Stay back. This may be a bit more challenging than the rest."

"Challenging?" came an old woman's voice

from beneath that shadowed hood. "Do you know who I am?"

Evaine hesitated a fraction of a second before answering. To Roxanne's eyes, in that moment Evaine's pose sharpened. "Why, grandmother! What a surprise to meet you here." Evaine's voice walked a fey boundary between joy and sarcasm. "Am I to be tested steel against steel? Or do you direct me to sheathe my sword, so I may try Three Hands Clapping against your weapons?"

"Grand-daughter, you could disappoint me. Your sword is not cleaned for you to sheathe it, and no one catches a chain-scythe with bare flesh," answered the older voice. "Not even I. On an unwise gamble, she who until then held my name somewhat before me tried."

"Most esteemed grandmother, I would not scabbard my blade in wood." She inclined her head ever so slight toward Greatmistress Illl, whose shrieks had sunk to dull grunts of pain. "And I cheat. Steel-laced auntlets. A warsap."

"Oh, precious," answered the old woman. "I thought your punches were connecting unreasonable firmly. I came only to watch, to interfere if need be. I was too late to act. That's what happens when you get too old. You are forever too late."

"Perfected One, your spirit knew what timing was needful, and brought you here in precisely that fullness of time." Evaine bowed ever so slightly. Roxanne began to feel seriously confused. Who was this woman that Evaine obviously knew so well? "I hope you did not find my performance worse than largely disgraceful?"

"I see I was quite mistaken in my estimation of you," answered the old woman. "I said before that you were largely lacking in skill. I see that you are in fact totally and utterly lacking in skill beyond any conceivable hope of redemption."

"Grandmother, I have complete faith in your wisdom."

Roxanne interrupted. "Now just you wait here! Whoever you are! Lacking in talent! Those were two greathands of guards here! Now they're all dead, except for this Goddess-cursed excuse for their commanding officer! I killed a hand of them myself. What would you view as indicating competence? Slaying the host of the sea demons -- singlehanded?" Roxanne had not expected the other two women to burst into giggles.

"Forgive me, grandmother," said Evaine, "but I have failed to introduce my companion. Here is my Lady Roxanne-sa-Anglewood-brith-Emmitsford, Greatmistress of Greatmistresses of the Host of the North. I am but her humble Córnet." Roxanne wrinkled her eyes suspiciously. That introduction was in the wrong order, she being presented first to this woman rather than vice versa. Evaine never made that sort of protocol error. "Esteemed Mistress, be pleased to meet Grandmother Sarah of Aya-Apulehta, nineteenth of her name, and my Temple's Abbess."

Oh! thought Roxanne. Rank hath its privileges. She sketched a salute with her sword. "Most revered

lady, welcome to the North. I had not known of your presence here." Finally many things made sense. Aya-pulchta was as good a Training Temple as existed, especially if you wanted someone who could lead as well as break heads. Their ways of describing skill were quaint, so that 'largely lacking in talent' meant that you saw huge errors in your moves and judgement that others could barely understand, let alone find unaided. And 'totally and utterly lacking' had a specific meaning, one she'd never learned. Demarra could tell her what Grandmother's revised judgement of Evaine meant. "We shall be most grateful for such of your wisdom as you choose to reveal to us, however unlikely we are to be enlightened by it."

"I'm sure you'll try," answered Grandmother. "Though your victory suggests you're largely beyond hope yourself." Roxanne decided those words were a compliment. "Dearest granddaughter," continued the Abbess, "I have yet two requests. First, you should try to learn errors in judgement from your mistress. One of these decades, I shall be unable to resist the desire to prune my roses all day, and someone totally and utterly lacking in judgement as well as skill will be begged by the Order to hide this disgrace by assuming my name. Second, the grunting one's Handdaughter confessed to me and my escort who sent these fools. I've since fed her to the Lion. There is no need to question the grunting one. Your quarrel is with Greatmistress of Greatmistress Signe Signesdotr herself. Now, you would not leave a horse in torment, would you? And surely a woman deserves treatment at least as good as a horse? Assuredly, only a Direct Example of Her Blessed Mercy can save that one's life. We have already waited more than long enough for this miracle to be Granted, had She so Willed."

Greatmistress llll's head went flying across the plaza. To Roxanne's eyes, Evaine had not appeared to move.

"I believe," said Roxanne, "that we are expected at Signe's party. Of course, this being the barbaric North, no one would find fault if I brought an additional guest. Your Grace?"

"I see the North is as mannered as the south. I hope none will look askance at black clothing?" Sarah answered.

"Grandmother, my mistress is still in white, you are black, and I'm blood-red. It's a traditional pattern," said Evaine.

"You're wounded! Why didn't you say something?" shouted Roxanne, preparing to launch her 'bleeding heroes still die' harangue.

"Not mine. I think. You stabbed and cut, mistress. But I sliced and diced; sliced people, well, spray. I'll sluice myself in the fountain and see if any of its mine."

"No, grand-daughter. I'll do that to you. You try to keep limber," ordered the Abbess.

Background conversation, explaining why the world is prejudiced against Roxanne.

"I don't care if a Full Manifestation annointed her, which is in any event theologically impossible, given what

she is. She *cannot* be made First Speaker. It's totally out of the question for the best of all possible reasons."

"Isn't that just a trifle firm? After all, she did halt the advance of the Sea Demons, using a force perhaps a third the size of the one that the Demons so thoroughly crushed. They besiege Noralin City, but fail to take it."

"It is of utterly no significance that she has been successful in fighting a few skirmishes. Those are meaningless skirmishes, skirmishes that pointedly always avoid the strength of the enemy. What matters is that the Sisterhood is the Moral Strength of Her Presence, not just Her Swift Right Arm. Roxanne-sa-Anglewood is absolutely unfit for any command position, no matter her successes on the battlefield."

"Say again?" nnn was now completely awake. "We have a Greatmistress of Greatmistresses? Of the Inspectorate itself? And she has morals problems? You wouldn't guess it from the way she ferrets out corruption in others. Or is she good at finding her own weaknesses?"

... drew her nails across the table. "The Inspectorate enforces prescribed duties. Did the Greathand sell its weapons to a scrap dealer and pocket the income? Is the Greathand's bouquet being properly sewn? Are its daughters properly fed and clothed? Roxanne-sa-Anglewood's failings are of a personal nature, to which as a matter of law the Inspectorate is blind."

"Personal morals? She's my neighbor, two courtyards over. She has a well-raised daughter. Her circle is highly cross-supportive, even if they're all so busy they..." ??? voice began to trail off "scarcely ever ... can guest a man ... properly."

"You see? You see! She's one of *them*. And they have a whole circle, all living together, so no one *notices*."

"Say what? She can't be, she has a daughter. Besides, zealous dedication to Her Perfect Image -- one-love -- is a sign of Faith, at least among those who have Honored the Mother, as she has done *twice*." A suspicion dawned in kkkk's mind.

"Precisely. She has a daughter. Whose father's name is known in the right quarters with certainty. Whose father visits her as regularly as possible. Whose father, Goddess-Only-Knows-How, got his daughter a ride on a \$%^&* flijtschiff. Whose father risked his life, as unbelievable as that may seem, to save his child from the Sea Demons."

Other Love. Euuww, unbelievable./
[In short, Roxanne and Tomas have a heterosexual monogamous relationship]

In a world where the gender ratio is 10:1 and their behavior is let us say viewed as a bit odd.

HOW YOU PLAY THE GAME # 20

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It was quite exciting to find out that *Interregnum* was being revived. I regret that I have no time to comment to specific contributors, but in general I found the anecdotes about gaming, book review and fiction to be most interesting. The game mechanics, supplements and gaming book reviews were of not interest to me (as I play mostly diceless games), although I am sure those are very useful to those who use game mechanics.

HOW YOU FIND THE GAME

About two years ago, I kept a partial journal of my efforts and Dana Derryberry's efforts to find a new gaming group when our old one dissolved. I thought others might find it interesting, so here it is.

Rumors of departure. The final night of my vacation in Colorado, I call Dana D to make sure he's picking me up at the airport. He tells me that the referee of our Anishinabe campaign, Scott, and his girlfriend broke up three days ago, and that Scott has announced he's moving to New Orleans as there is no longer anything for him in Madison.

I urge Dana D not to get too upset about this. Didn't our fellow player Colette announce a year ago she was moving to New Orleans and never follow through?

He agrees, but is gloomy.

This is the end, my friend. A week and a half later, our referee, Scott, announces he has a job in New Orleans and will move there May 30. So much for my hope it would fall through.

I try to be happy for him, but am deeply disappointed that we will lose this campaign. He is a good ref, with a flair for description, myth and running campaigns where the

character's goals are spiritual rather than material. Plus he's read all my reference books on Anishinabe culture. It could be years before we get a ref with similar talents.

I calculate we have three game sessions left. Dana D no longer wants to play, now that it is clear that we lack time to pursue major story arcs. I resist, wanting to squeeze out every drop of gaming I can.

Looking for Mr. Goodgame. Dana D and I go to Pegasus Games, the local gaming shop (also famous as "Pegasaurus Games" in Dork Tower), to look over the bulletin board. There are three ads, one for a D&D game, one for a Vampire game, and one for an Amber game. The bad handwriting and terseness of the D&D game suggests junior high to me; we skip it. The Vampire game lists Tonia as a contact -- we strongly suspect I know Tonia, as we played with a 19-year old Tonia in an ill-fated Rolemaster campaign. She wasn't a bad player, but our styles were very different, different enough that I'd prefer not to look into the Vampire game if there's something else available. We skip that and look at the Amber ad.

The Amber ad lists two UW students who are looking for "emotionally mature" players to stir up things in a diceless Amber campaign. We figure we're emotionally mature. I don't know if I want to stir things up or not, but gaming beats not gaming....

Dana D emails Tom, one of the two contacts. One of my favorite gamers is a former UW student named Tom, so the name seems like a good omen.

Tom emails back that this is a great time to join the group, as they have just finished a story arc. Any gamer who can use the word "story arc" in a sentence has a plus in my book.

Tom wants to know how much we know about the Zelazny books and the Amber diceless system, but says we aren't required to know anything. That's good, because I'm not a player who has the energy or inclination to study the system, diceless or not, and because it's been some time since I've last read the Amber books.

Tom thinks we should meet ASAP to create characters. I'm suspicious. Where's their screening? Haven't they ever been burned by new players? I'm beginning to feel like Groucho Marx -- I'm not sure I want to belong to any gaming group that will automatically have me as a member. Then again, considering the problems that have occasionally cropped up in other games, perhaps there is no reliable way to screen for incompatibility of gaming style. Just do it, and find out.

Dana D calls Tom to set up a meeting; they agree Saturday at a restaurant downtown. Tom suggests McDonald's, and says he'll be the chubby guy with the laptop. I'm

disappointed, given that there's lots of other cheap restaurants with better food nearby. Does this mean these gamers don't care much for good food? Can anyone who would prefer McDonald's to other restaurants create an elegant Amberian atmosphere? Why am I even thinking about their restaurant tastes? I try to rein my self in. I need to cut these people more slack. But every crumb of information may tell me something about whether I would enjoy gaming with these people or not. Tom agrees to meet at the Sunroom instead. Maybe this will work.

Auditions. Tom proves to be a stocky man in his 30s, with a mustache and reasonably short hair. His group has four players currently, two men and two women. He wants us to join the group because it is starting to become polarized, the men versus the women. I exchange glances with Dana D. An infighting group is not good news, but it's possible the entry of two new players might tone it down.

We ask what characters are being played. Susan, his wife, plays Raeeda, a mistress of Pattern magic, who apparently sometimes gets manipulated by the Pattern. Tom recounts some deed she did that others disliked, but "it wasn't her fault, the Pattern made her do it." I personally think that this excuse could wear thin with repetition, but with any luck it won't become an issue.

Bob plays Logan, a skilled fighter who wants as much power as he can get. Logan has apparently alienated a few folks with his quick-draw. The more I hear, the more I think I might not react well either. I hope he's learned to think before he strikes. I hope he didn't name his character after the X-Man.

Mark plays Arcanus, a powerful Trump artist who was the sorcerer king of his planet and who thinks he can talk to Jean Luc Picard. The genre crossing troubles me a bit - silly one-shots can be a nice break, but I like my campaigns straight, for the most part.

Tammy plays Guin or Guinevere, another mage type, but one who manipulates both chaos and order-based magic. She was the Queen of the Fairies on her former world. Hmmm. Guess we can call ourselves anything we want -- Emperor Norton, Queen of the Fairies -- it could be fun.

We ask Tom if he has any questions for us. No, he doesn't.

I'm a little surprised, but this leaves room for all my questions. Scheduling may be a problem -- they like to play on Thursday nights, but I really hate playing on weeknights. Plus they play at Tom's home at 6:00, which is a half hour drive from my house. I usually

get home around 6:30 and do not want to stay up late. If I play with them on Thursdays, I'll have to leave work at least an hour early. Gnyah. We'll see how it works out.

We leave optimistic and resolve to work on our characters. I really hate coming up with new characters.

Introductions. About three weeks later, we manage to have characters ready to join the game. Dana D and I will play two sisters.

Tom's wife, Susan, is dark-haired, with a quiet smile, and works in a bookstore when she is not gaming. Tammi is a night nurse, blonde and quietly stubborn. Bob is a slim zoology grad student with dark hair and a neatly trimmed beard. Mark has short dark hair and a round, friendly face that seems very youthful. I am quite surprised to find out he is a pediatrician.

Mark quickly befriends our new characters, but the other three players seem to ignore us. Mmmh. Not a great sign, but it is clear that Bob and Susan have some intricate intrigues going on that are distracting them now. Maybe things will change next time.

Looking back. I stopped keeping the journal about this time. And we didn't come to a conclusion in the second session about our fellow players..

But after several sessions, Dana D and I concluded that:

- (1) We played off Mark very well, because we all enjoyed witty banter and setting up situations for the characters to develop in emotionally..
- (2) We had problems playing off Tammi, but so did everyone. Tammi's interest in banter (and any kind of interaction) was low. She preferred not to actually interact with the other characters unless we were fighting together, and would often avoid them by returning to some pocket universe that only she could enter and exit.
- (3) Bob didn't mind banter, but found it distracting. He wanted a very different game than we did – one where strategy and planning for a battle to win the rulership of Amber were paramount. Also, Bob felt that strategically speaking, he had to be prepared to double-cross the other players if a covert opportunity arose. We couldn't deny that Bob was emulating some of

Zelazny's characters – but we also felt strongly that double-crossed are more fun to read about than to play.

(4) Susan was interested in the kind of game we were, but almost all her primary connections in game were with NPCs, and she was ginger about forming bonds with other PCs. Then again, this pattern might be explained by her husband Tom's pleasant personality and the Amberian setting. After seeing Bob's admitted interest in double-cross, anyone might be chary of forming relationships in an Amber game.

The potential conflicts were numerous. Dana D and I like emotional development of characters as a story line, with a group that is reasonably loyal to one another and interested in interacting with one another. We were not terribly interested in playing Amber as a strategic war game with the goal of taking the throne.

We decided to keep playing the game in the hope things would improve. Tom is excellent at pacing, and pretty good at plotting. With sufficient fast and dirty action, he was able to keep philosophical differences to a low simmer.

Still, the differences took their toll. Although we worked hard on trying to connect our characters to Bob and Tammi, Bob eventually dropped out because of his wife's pregnancy, and a sense that others didn't share his vision of Amber. He did it gracefully in an email explaining his reasons. Tammi did not drop out formally, but her appearances at game sessions became infrequent and finally stopped. The informal explanation we got through Susan was that Tammi's schedule made Thursday nights difficult. This may have been true or not. But I've always been a fan of graceful excuses, and saw no reason to question it.

A new start. With two members gone, Susan briefly tried a different character. Amber became a more relationship-centered game, but the game still had difficulties, primarily because the characters were quite overpowered and because Dana D and I continued to press for a more developed background with supportive NPC's – more of a city game than a questing game (or a camping trip game, as I often think of them).

Tom announced he was starting a new campaign, influenced by Amber, but without character sheets or point allocations (which I liked). The characters would start as children in a Shadow, growing up together (which we liked as good background and a good incentive for family loyalty later on). And, as an Amberian characteristic, the characters would seem normal at first, and later manifest *interesting* powers.

And thus began the Radom campaign (or Warsaw 90210, as I describe it sometimes). The characters range from 12 to 15 years of age, in a setting modeled on Renaissance Poland. They are all from the same aristocratic family. Tom has brought the city of Warkrawa to life with great detail and skill, creating a household headed by our uncle, with servants and acquaintances, fighting practice and church, and occasional outings to the Seym to watch our elders argue. Tom has peppered it with magic, tragedy and mystery, as well as a bit of romance. It's gone smashingly.

Perhaps I should say, smashingly from my perspective. Although I think Tom is happy, too. No group is ever 100% happy. It's the nature of groups. Mark prefers more fighting, Susan prefers more romance, I was miffed my loyal retainer NPC (I love those kind) died right off the bat and was never replaced, and Dana D thinks he made his character, the 12-year old, too young. But these are minor points, and one Tom tries to address. All in all, we've had a great time the last year. I hope it lasts as long as possible. No game does, of course, but this is a good one.

And if it does fall apart, well, there's always the board at the local game store. That's my favorite way to find groups. It's not bad for gamers, either, but if you already have a ref, you can usually find acquaintances who are interested in gaming as players. That's particularly true if you are playing a game where players don't need to know any rules, as we usually do.

NEW AND CURRENT

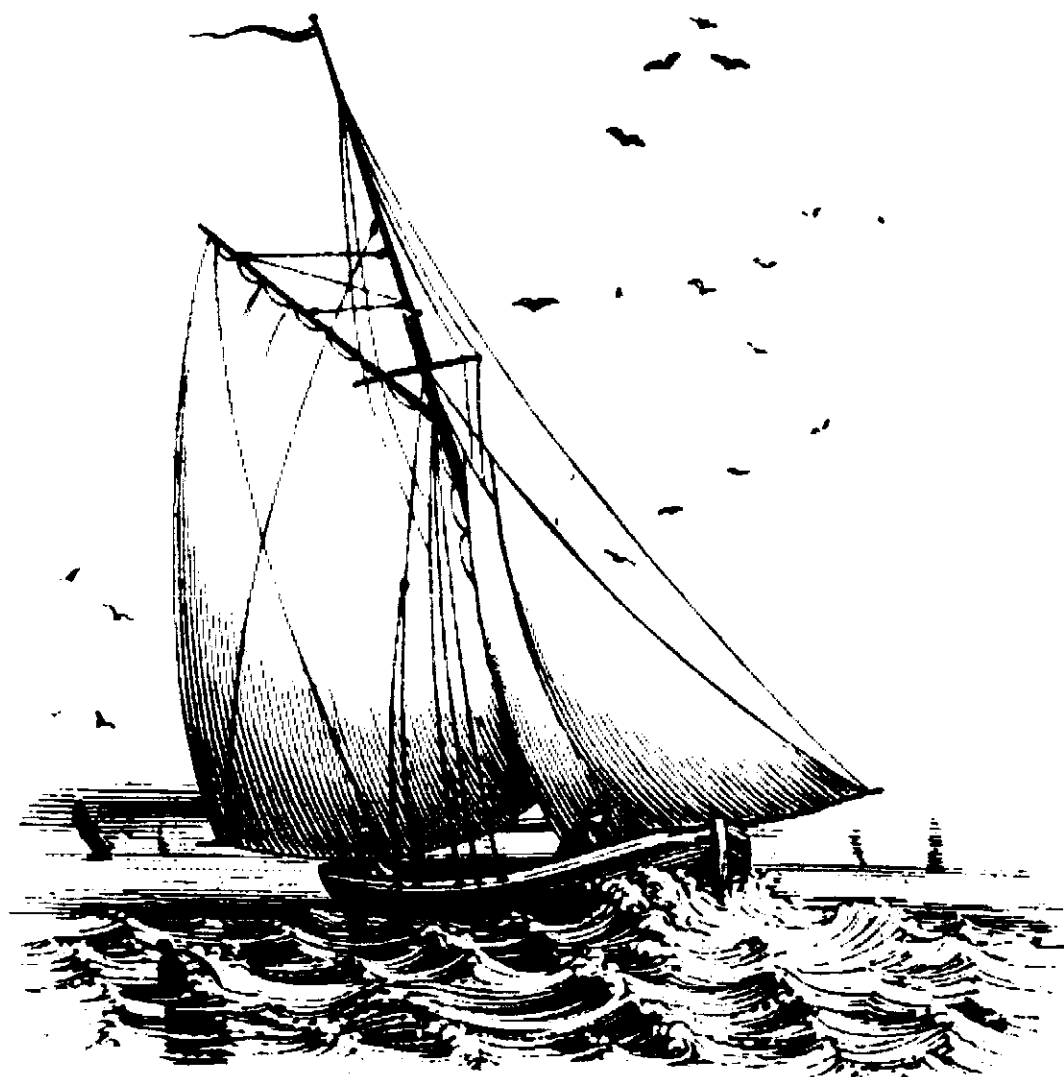
***Farscape*:** This new series on the SF channel is Interesting visual candy. Most of the characters are simple stereotypes, but it was mildly interesting. It didn't grip me the entire hour, though, as I found the world figure skating championships equally diverting. I may catch some more episodes to see how it develops.

Kage Baker's *Sky Coyote*: This sequel to *In the Garden of Iden* is well written, with a terrific and bawdy sense of humor, as facilitator Joseph tries to persuade a Chumash Indian village in California in the 1500's to step into the future. Mendoza, the heroine of the first book, also makes an appearance, although in a supporting role. The only problem with *Sky Coyote* is that it reads like a middle book. The beginning makes little sense unless one has read the first book. And the ending provides little satisfying resolution to the dilemmas facing Joseph and Mendoza. Nonetheless, I recommend her books as some of the best things to come out in the last two years, and will keep buying them for friends.

George R.R. Martin's *Clash of Kings*. Speaking of middle book syndrome, this entertaining book is a prime example of it, as the sequel to Martin's earlier *Game of Thrones*. Martin writes rip-roaring melodramatic fantasy, with plots that just won't quit. I highly recommend it to anyone looking for a traditional fantasy setting.

If Martin has one flaw, it is that he follows so many different characters through the course of the book that it can be hard to keep them all straight. I spent the entire first chapter trying to remember who Theon Greyjoy was, and was quite irked that there was no glossary of names at the beginning of the book. I was even more irked when I finished the book and discovered that there was a glossary at the very end, a place I don't like to turn to for fear of reading the ending before I am ready. Perhaps the publishers will change this with the next book.

Jane Yolen's *The One-Armed Queen*. This is another sequel, continuing the story told in *Sister Light*, *Sister Dark* and *White Jenna*. Initially, I was disappointed because the heroine, Jenna's daughter, lacks many of the qualities I admired in Jenna. But by the end, I was won over by Yolen's honest writing and insight into the human heart – Jenna's daughter recovers her mother's throne in her own way, following her own instincts.

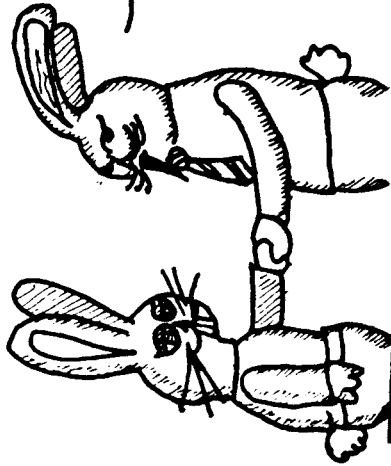


The Wanderings of Widdershins
His parents took the only

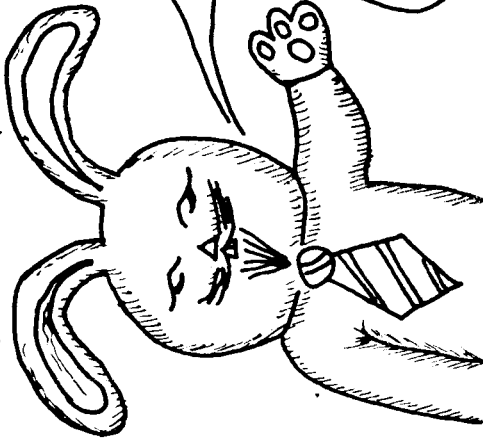
action they knew to...

⑨

Hello - I am
Herr Doktor
Boseman.



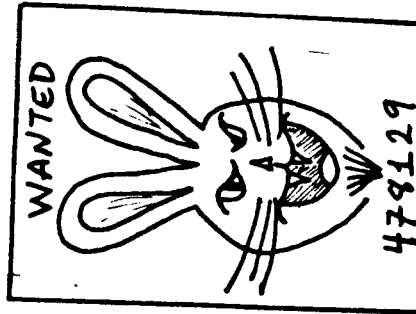
But, something wasn't quite right... ⑩



I entered
the field to
explore my own
deep seated issues.
Now I can pretend
to address your
concerns while I
toy with your
psyche - Muh-hu-hu
ha-ha-ha

⑪

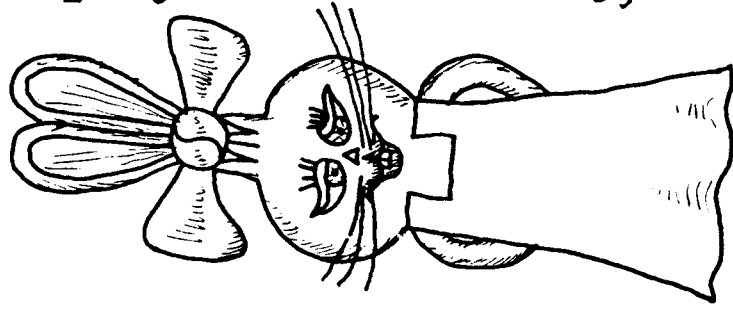
It was only a
matter of time before
the old Widdershins
re-emerged (except
Dr. Boseman did convince
Widdershins to grow
a goatee). Dr. Boseman
got Widdershin's original
"Trolls-n-Travails" which



he sold to a collector
while Widdershins became a famous
hitman. His man turned him into
the police for a nice reward.

⑫

I saved my son from
role-playing, and you can save
your child too. Join the Fellow
League Of Outraged Rabid Mothers
Against Trolls (Floormat).



Recognize the warning signs:

- (1) Sudden interest in school,
- (2) New friends,
- (3) Increase in reasoning powers,
- (4) and, new social skills.

Stop your kids before it's
too late!

RS '97

Shapiro
2/1/97

Firestarter 13

being the mental and occasionally scholastic wanderings of Collie Collier
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*The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety)
by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.*
— H. L. Mencken

I know this zine ish is supposed to have an Ignorable theme of 'Forming a Gaming Group.' However, I've not been in a successful game for over 5 years now, despite my (increasingly half-hearted) efforts. I consequently can't think of anything helpful or useful to tell folks regarding this subject... except perhaps that one shouldn't do whatever it is I did. Unfortunately I'm not even sure what precisely are the mistakes I've been making that cause me such troubles in finding a good gaming group.

So... this one's just commentary on the previous IR -- I'd like to make deadline for Kiralee. ☺

INTERREGNUM #29

Me

Argh... my last zine has taught me to use a spell-checker... how embarrassing! Sorry, all.

Joe Teller

Re your comments on gun ownership, I thought you might be interested in some facts that have occurred since the paper was written. Please note: I quite agree with your assessment of the situation, with the sole disagreement that I like to think some solution is possible. Maybe it's Pollyanna of me... I sure don't believe it will occur out of the kindness of people's hearts. We seem now to be a nation dedicated first and foremost to security, not freedom, and we all know what Ben Franklin said about that.

But anyways... first, there's an extremely interesting book out, titled "More Guns, Less Crime: Understanding Crime and Gun Control Laws" (University of Chicago Press, 1998) written by an economist named John Lott. Mr. Lott was not an advocate of gun rights previous to his report, and was in fact fairly indifferent to the issue... at least until he was assigned the task of researching the usage of guns in defense. He is another on the list of academia who began their research with vague anti-gun leanings, who later changed positions on the issue.

Mr. Lott concludes crime comes from fewer rather than more guns. In fact, he demonstrates that concealed weapon laws have a significant impact: just brandishing a weapon stops crime completely 98% of the time. Greatest reductions in crime are seen in poorer areas when residents get guns for defense. I find this fascinating, especially considering your comments about our "economy and system is designed and has been right along so that there must always be a miserable underclass..." It would make excellent sense, if you wanted this underclass to exist, to keep it a lawless and helpless scapegoat for all social issues.

If you like, there are some excellent articles by him at <<http://www.uniblabb.com/collie/gun-editorial.html>>. Yes, I have Lott's permission to reprint his articles. ☺

Secondly, the British, Australians, and Canadians. For the longest time I thought of them (at least in regards to guns and their cultures) as social goals to aspire to... but now I find they're having the same problems we are. In the case of Canada, they've *always* had more violent crime than we have in America, even after adjusting for population differences (see <<http://www.ssaa.org.au/CANUSA.GIF>>). Most notably, there was a schoolyard massacre a few years ago in Canada -- something that was supposedly anathema to the 'Canadian psyche.' No one could stop the gunman, and thus many children died.

In the case of Britain and Australia, as guns are becoming less and less common, violent crime is rising steadily. Believe it or not, if we equivalently compare populations, Britain now has *more* violent crime than America. It's unsurprising, really. If you were a thief, would you be more worried about robbing a house where the owner might be home and armed... or a home where the owner might be home, but you *know* for a fact that she/he won't be armed?

Scarily enough, violent crime is practically skyrocketing (relatively speaking) in Australia -- check out <<http://www.ssaa.org.au/ilasep98.html>>. A quick quote from that report:

The figures are contained in the Australian Bureau of Statistics publication "Recorded Crime" which reviews the rate of reported incidents across a broad range of offences. The data indicate that between 1996 and 1997, serious crime increased considerably in Australia. Murder rose by 3.2%, assaults increased by 8.6%, armed robbery grew by a frightening 44%, unarmed robbery increased by 21%, unlawful entry with intent, including both (UEWI) involving the taking of property and (UEWI) 'other', rose by 3.9%, while motor vehicle theft increased by 6.1%.

And from 'The Age,' the Fairfax Australia News, I quote:

The Premier, Mr Jeff Kennett, also cautioned against 'short-term expediency,' saying that while he could understand calls for more police and extended gun amnesties in the wake of the shootings, such measures would probably not help. ...
Mr Howard said he was appalled by the recent shootings, in particular by the apparent triviality of a couple of the events that triggered them. But he argued that the violence did not necessarily indicate that the gun laws had failed. 'It's too early to make a judgment as to whether the new national gun laws are effective. I believe they are, but you will need to wait a number of years and observe the trends over that period of time to make a judgment,' Mr Howard said.

I found this article fascinating. Apparently Mr. Howard is more than willing to use 'short-term expediency' to justify confiscation of guns... but god forbid his own reasoning for immediate action should be used against him. Furthermore, I love the fact that he's willing to let people die in an attempt to justify his personal cherished beliefs. It seems to me this clearly shows his true agenda. As the old saying goes, 'gun control' isn't about guns... it's about **control**.'

Well, that's enough pontificating from me... ☺

Rebecca Teed

Re my having possible strong feelings in regards to 'hegemony' as implying predominance of one thing over another, I'd have to say yes. While I do not consider myself a cultural relativist, I emphatically do not believe in blind ethnocentrism either. I don't think other cultures are necessarily better than my native culture – but I sure don't think mine is the best of all possible worlds either! Like people, I feel cultures have good and bad parts. It's up to us as responsible and hopefully informed citizens to pick and chose what we'll emphasize in our daily lives, in order to maintain both our own and our culture's health.

LOL! Okay, I'll keep your advice in mind – no friends as bodyguards when I take over the world.

David W. Dickie

Ah, philosophical debate -- I rise unswervingly to the bait! ☺ Well, let's see. In regards to your comment about the police/citizen shootings, I'd have to do more research before I could state definitively that it was or wasn't 'apples and oranges,' as you say.

Re arguing that cars are a necessity, whereas guns generally aren't, I could offer the anthropologist's viewpoint... namely, that you believe cars are a necessity because that's what your worldview has taught you. However, there are many cultures with excellent public transport that get by just fine without this 'necessity.'

As far as guns generally not being a necessity, I could also argue that in a lawless society (and in some places of America this is emphatically so) a means of defense is most assuredly a necessity. Hm... no, that's a weak argument, in that it applies only to a segment of the population. We need something that applies for all.

Umm... okay, how's this? Guns actually are a necessity, in the same way that blood banks are – you may only need it once in your life, but if you don't have it – you're probably dead.

Oh – even better! While it's not currently a prevalent social meme in America, a gun could be said to be a symbol of responsible citizenship. Owning a gun means you are prepared (and hopefully trained!) to protect and defend not only yourself but others as well. In such a situation, gun ownership could be said to mark the mature, adult psyche.

Don't know how applicable you'll find all that, but it was fun to think about. ☺

David Dunham

Re your comment:

The only part you lost me was the "criminals are victims of the system" bit.

Argh -- you caught me! ☺ I didn't really believe that either, but was required by the argumentation template we were supposed to be using to have a population group that appeared to be at fault – but actually was not.

About the only possible agreement to the 'criminals as victims of the system' argument which I could muster is the large number of individuals imprisoned in the so-called War on Drugs. I can't recall who precisely said it, but there's a quote I heard once about prisons being made by bricks of law, just as brothels are built of bricks of religion. I think the War on Drugs is based on **bad laws**... I can't help but wonder, should we legalize drugs, if a huge amount of our violent crime problem would just disappear.

To everyone else, RAEBNC, and see you soon!

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THE SWASHBUCKLING MAGE RIDES AGAIN #1

"When Muses talk we listen... even at 3 AM on a Tuesday."

Copyright ©1999 By Joseph W. Teller

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Introduction: With the recent changes in *Interregnum*, Kiralee and I decided that we should split our zine into two separate pieces, and that in the process her own contributions in print would increase for the benefit of IR. We're also encouraging Cindy to put together her own zine, and to expand her involvement in IR. In the off chance that you are new to IR, I'm the Assistant Editor, Art Director, Promotions Manager, Printer Liaison, Webmaster, Computer Guru, Chief Cook and Bottle washer for *Interregnum*. I've been GMing for 20 years now, have designed a number of game systems, written for a number of APAs and Semi-Pro gaming publications, and generally lived an unusual life that I think gives me a unique viewpoint on humanity and reality. (Of course this last part is also true of many of the people I've encountered along the way, at least in my opinion).

Personal Notes:

A lot has happened since between our last zine (which was written before the Hiatus) and this one, more than I can fill in here easily. Our weekly gaming group is going strong, and is presently playtesting the *Mysterious Earth* setting for our *Shadow Bindings* RPG (The Third setting to be released, only in Alpha release), a Neo-Pulp 1930s earth with some surreal elements that make it unique and hopefully fun for everyone involved.

Shadow Bindings has indeed been released since our last zine, and has gone thru some heavy revision, and is now in its 4th incarnation (available on our website). We've also released Beta versions of *Victoria Eternal* (A Victorian Fantasy Setting), *Night Watch* (A 1950s World where magic has come back into the world, fed by the dreams of the sleeping from twilight until dawn) and the just released *Mysterious Earth*. We have a number of other settings planned, but since I'm the only writer for the game it takes a time between them (I also like to put some time into playtesting, VE was run for 6 months, NW for just shy of a year, and ME is in its 6th week of playtesting).

I'm typing this on my new computer. The portable, after 2 ½ years of faithful service, is being terribly cranky and troublesome, so we decided that it was time to take advantage of the low price point for desktops and get me one before the market bounced again. (A replacement portable was out of the

question, since they are becoming less and less reliable and are designed to work for a year at the most these days since most die while going thru the airport and commuter grunge. Mine had beat the breakage curve as it traveled only occasionally and was handled very carefully).

It was interesting convincing the salesman that we didn't want a huge screen as the unit had to sit on a small roll-away cart that had been used for the portable when at home. We ended up with an HP Pavilion 4450, hardly a top of the line machine, but faster than Kiralee's or Cindy's and with the sort of specs I considered important (the tower is the smallest they make, thus a small footprint, 64 meg of Ram and a hard drive three times as big as the portable has). Its taking a little getting used to (our first Win98 system) but in general I like what its capable of and enjoying writing on it. The hardest part is breaking in the Spell checker on the word processor, as I lost my personal dictionary additions that were on the portable.

I've been writing for *Alarums & Excursions* while IR has been on Hiatus, and have found it a very different experience. Its not my first exposure to the oldest RPG APA in the world, but its changed a lot since I was reading it back in the early 80s. A lot of the minimalists are present in the pages, a school of gaming I just don't fit into. The historical discussions have been interesting, but there is definitely a lot of cultural differences between the writers there and the folks here in IR.



Topic: Forming A Gaming Group

Alright, I can admit it now that I chose this topic and convinced Kiralee to use it for this issue. Why? Because this is one of several that interest me on a regular basis.

Forming a gaming group, for me, in recent years has been a hit-and-miss Situation.

As there has been a decline in the gaming market, in stores that carry gaming related materials and an even greater decline in stores that have gaming areas or clubs associated with them, its become harder to maintain a gaming group.

In recent years most of my players have been recruited thru the surviving stores and running a recruitment flyer. Posting ads for players on the Internet, in newsgroups, on player connection services and on my website has rarely produced any results. I think its because the Internet is too global, and the probability of linking up with gamers local to oneself is fairly low.

The net can be good for a PBEmail game, but I don't care for that style - its just not the right level of interaction for me. I burned myself out in PBMs a long time ago, when I ran one with about a hundred players back in 80s via normal postal mail. I found myself writing the equivalent of a novel each month.

For a while, back in the late 80s and early 90s, I primarily gamed with friends from my days running a gaming store that had broken off with me when the store's club had crumbled away (it was complex, and I ended up leaving after heavy disputes with the owner that broke the club up over money matters). They drew in a few new friends and roommates into the group and went merrily along until time and space eventually split the group up in too many directions all over the country. Most of us lost touch over time.

In the days of BBS systems I gained a few players thru ads on these, but these were very local operations, nothing like the far spanning reaches of the Internet, and tended to form their own small local communities. (I was a Sysop for years, and gained about 6 players over the years from the BBS.

My current group consists of Kiralee and Cindy (Both whom I live with, of course) and six other players, five of whom were recruited thru a flyer in a gaming store (the sixth is a lady-friend of one of the others). I've also had about 6 players in the past 9 months who have come and gone from the gaming group, because they found the group, the game system, the setting or the schedule was not acceptable to their needs. This is actually a better track record than some friends I know who have been gaming for years elsewhere who have trouble getting even three or four people together for a game.

Always be sure to give a player a good idea of what the group and games are about. I had one player recently leave after a single session, telling me that he was more used to a 'Wargaming' style of play rather than a 'Roleplaying' style of gaming.

When you can, it is a good idea to recruit folks who want to run games as well as those who want to play. Sooner or later every GM gets a touch of burnout or too busy a schedule, and if you can have an alternative that keeps the group to a steady schedule in your absence then your game doesn't collapse when this occurs.

A steady schedule, such as a straight weekly one that always runs on the same day at the same time, keeps players coming back, as they get into the ritual of going to the game each and every week. If there are too many breaks or the schedule is more sporadic, players will begin to drift off, make other plans or simply forget to show up each week.

Never give a player any form of compensation, character experience or character growth from their being absent from a game, its reinforcing a bad habit that can damage the game for everyone involved.

If the storyline or player's goals require a character to be out of play for a long period of time, be sure that a backup character is prepared, or that you have a supporting character that's already involved that the player can pick up and play while their main character is out. This is especially true in games with realistic combat where a player character might end up wounded, hospitalized or killed during a session. A player with nothing to do for one or more weeks is a player that's likely to drop out of your game.

A good GM is willing to bend a little to the interests and ideas of the players in other things. Occasionally having a break to try out the new board game that they just got or showing a video that they feel would work to

'put things in the mood' for a setting is a good way to help unify the players more.

If possible a GM should socialize with the players outside the game as well, even if its just going out to dinner after the game now and then. Gaming is as much about socializing as it is about playing.

Don't give players an excuse to leave in the middle of the game for munchies, make sure that there is a plan to deal with food and drink at the game, especially if the game runs late. A break of that sort of duration can spoil the mood and pacing easily in any game, and if it happens too often it can permanently damage the group. This is why we always make sure that the hosting locale has lots of soda and some munchies on hand, easy access to menus for food places that deliver, clean dishware and glasses.

First impressions with new players are very important. Make sure that when you meet them and they first arrive at the hosting home, that the game area is clean, prepared, and that it is clear where the GM will be seated. Needed materials like spare dice, scrap paper, writing tools, blank character sheets, rule books, reference materials should all be at hand in an organized manner.

Being organized as a GM is important. Make sure that you are prepared before the players arrive. If you have to break and search for ten or fifteen minutes for a printout, book, file, handout or prop, then you are breaking the flow of the game. Be prepared to put as much preparation time in before each game session as the actual session will take. Take your job as GM seriously - if you don't the players won't either and you'll soon find yourself without players.

Make sure the rest of the house areas that they might access is also clean and tidy - Vacuum! Sweep! No one wants to walk on a carpet or floor that sticks to you like the floor of a movie theater. Make sure the bathroom and kitchen areas are clean (and that paper towels and toilet paper are well stocked).

Give new players a tour of the areas that they might need to access. Let them know where the glasses, plates, serving bowls, silverware, and microwave are. Make sure to let them know that they are welcome - hospitality is important in building your social contract with the players.

All these little things add up to help get the kind of player you want.



Comments on IR #29:

IR 29 was obviously the catch-up issue, and many of the zines had been written almost a year before when IR went into Hiatus. Only Kiralee's Editorial Pages and Collie's Zine at the end of the issue were prepared after the changeover of staffing.

Some of the WWW resources I listed in last issue have gone away, specifically the Tower of London Virtual Tour no longer exists. Lothlorien has now moved to www.elfwood.com (and has expanded to include not just Fantasy/SF art but also short fiction in the same genre).

As usual, anyone I fail to comment on, it wasn't that your zine was unread or unappreciated, just that I had nothing particular to add or ask. In other words RAEBNC should be applied.

The Guest: Our local gaming group has recovered since last we wrote, and we're now running a game Sundays from 1-5 that is suffering from having a number of transitory or part-time players. It took a while though - over 6 months we went thru about 9 players that didn't work out, but now the group is at a very healthy 8 players (Sometimes a few too many for me to handle when everyone makes the game).// The Cthulhu product reviews were welcome - I buy material for that game (although I don't run it) as the research that they put into it is excellent to apply to several of my game settings.// "Everything I Needed To Learn I Learned In My First Campaign" is sitting on the wall near the entrance to the Living Room where we game. My next trick is getting the non-resident players to actually follow ANY of the rules in my pulp campaign. I suspect at least one of them is taking perverse pleasure in trying to break all of the rules before the present storyline is completed.

Notes From A Caffeine Based Lifeform:

I've attempted to learn both Java and C from books and found myself terribly dated. I was trained in the old school of programming (Fortran, Cobol, Basic, QuickBasic) and find even languages like CA Realizer extremely hard to work with. I also consider most of the so-called modern languages a step backwards, more like the low level programming of Assembly than high-level languages, and most of them are far too tied to the operating systems (Windows). I learned programming when one didn't need to be a math major to do so either, just have algebra under your belt and the ability to think thru processes on paper. (And yes, the first machine I did programming on was via a Teletype, though I could have done it on a deck of punch cards).

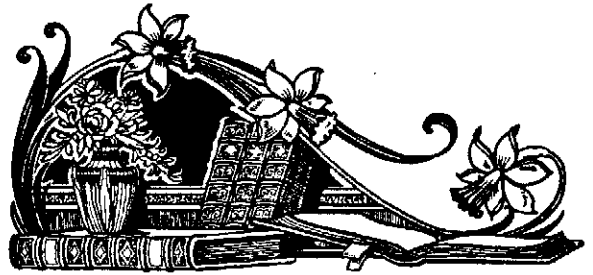
T.F.T.E.U.: The Legend Behind Whispering Hill was a pleasant riddle-game presentation (If only these things worked well in game - every time I've set up a riddle match in a game the players have failed to solve the riddles). The Adventure you've woven it with sounds like it would work well in Pendragon.

Firestarter: Doc Savage wasn't a 70s pulp novel character, he was a 1930s-40s pulp character (but they were reprinted in the 70s in badly stripped down versions of the stories). He was actually the character that inspired nearly all the heroes of the 30s, 40s and onwards, including Superman (Doc's full name was Clark Savage Jr, and he had a Fortress of Solitude in Antarctica years before Superman ever saw print).

Doc was an explorer, physician, inventor, and general adventurer with a team of experts that helped design his equipment and did most of the legwork in his adventures. The Novels inspired many real-life inventions, and were a pro-technology Super-Patriotism type of fiction that was common in the years leading up to and thru WWII. The author, Lester Dent, did a lot of real-world research for his settings and ideas, so the novels are a lot more realistic than Modesty Blaise or Casca were in the 70s. Most people don't really know much about Doc Savage these days, except some pretty poor comic book adaptations in recent years, and a camp style movie that came out some 20 years ago. I have an article on my website by one of the writers for A&E regarding the great pulp heroes of the 1930s and 40s and am working on (now in Alpha Release) a setting book for *Shadow Bindings* RPG on our Website called *Mysterious Earth*.

I decided against running a Pbem game, partially because of the explosion of members for my weekly FTF game, and a lot of other time-eating events recently. I also just don't have the writing muse to run something that large a scale right now. If the muse returns to do such I'll be sure to drop you a line.

I fully understand what you mean by the benefits of a larger adult household - the three of us are able to pool resources and deal with operation needs much better than most folks (I handle most of the housework, cooking, errand running, computer operations, building maintenance, business communications and daily life needs, Cindy and Kiralee hold down the 8-5 office jobs that pay the bills). It gives me time to pursue my writing muse.



Books In Brief:

A lot of books have passed into (and in some cases out of) our shelves in the past year. A few that I would recommend to folks to take a look at:

Celebrity Vampires Ed. By Martin H. Greenberg. A Collection of short stories about Celebrities and Vampires (and a few who might have become vampires) spanning from the Victorian Era to the recent modern era. Half the fun is figuring out exactly who the celebrity is in the story, and in some cases who the vampire is. The first tale is a tale told in letters by Irene Adler, with a nice surprise twist, and most of the others have a lot of fun with celebrities and the legends of vampires. This book would be a disappointment for the White Wolf Angst crowd, but I found it an enjoyable light read.

Indiana Jones and the Dance of The Giants By Rob MacGregor. Not as recent (1991) but still easily found in print in most stores, this is the second of the paperback series of new Indiana Jones Stories, written by the man who did the book version of the third movie. It covers the Summer and early Fall of 1925 and the first teaching assignment of the later to be famous archaeologist. It seems all the books in the series are the events in his life before the movies, and gives us some insight into his past and friendships. I missed the

first book (The Perils at Delphi) but plan on ordering it from Amazon.com shortly since the local SF/Fantasy store doesn't have it available. (I try to shop locally when things are available first, then hit other resources). The author has a good grasp on the character and helps along his development, and also has a fairly good grasp on the pulp genre of writing that the series has to properly draw from. It's only flaw is that it overly depends on the reader having read the previous novel to catch some of the references in the plot, a flaw that the series in general seems to have. (An artifact from the previous novel is important to the plot of this one, as is the relationship with one of the supporting characters who doesn't appear in any of the movies). I picked up the other books that were on the shelf at the store, and need to order the missing ones so I can read them all. It's a face paced read, not quite as heart stopping as the movies, and worth reading if you enjoyed the films or are a fan of pulp style of writing (I am).

Midsummer Night's Dreams Edited By M. Christian. This collection of short stories is relatively new (Sept. 1998) but is not easy to find on the shelves of most bookstores, as it is published by Rhinoceros, a small press publisher of sorts. They do have a website, www.masqueradebooks.com and I think it's definitely worth the effort to acquire for many folks. All of the stories are erotic interpretations and intertwining explorations into events and lives touched by Shakespeare's *Midsummer Nights Dream*. It contains a number of explicit sexually oriented scenes and events, including some that might offend those who are not open minded to alternative sexuality. Some of the stories deal directly with the main characters from the play (one is even done in a

Shakespearian style of line, meter and prose), some with events that might have occurred offstage and others with what might have followed the events of the play. Others center around how reading or performing in the play can affect the souls of ordinary mortals, raising questions about their own grasp of reality or inflaming their own passions towards other members of the cast in ways that seem that there be indeed the hand of Puck reaching into their lives. It would be best to approach it with a knowledge of the original play, but it is not necessary, and certainly one must be in the right mood to read such romantic passages. You won't find the inspiration for the next "Shakespeare In Love" here, but most of the stories have cute twists on the source, characters and even a snooty English Literature Professor or two getting lessons in the fact that the Bards Tale was intended as a celebration of life and fantasy, not an inspiration for boring dissertations. If you are offended by open scenes of sexuality, lust, mistaken identity, concepts like poor Bottom visiting a psychiatrist to help him with an appetite for hay and clover as a side effect from his previous transformation, or parodies of Gilbert & Sullivan musical pieces with words a bit too offensive to repeat here, then perhaps this is not the book for you. But if you are interested in an unusual entertainment, and willing to remember the words of the bard, below, then it might be worth seeking out, as it is a fun mixture of fantasies for the imagination.

*"If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear."
-- (Act 5, Scene 1)*

NOTES FROM A CAFFEINE BASED LIFEFORM #16

David W. Dickie
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<http://world.std.com/~ddickie>

Stuff of very little interest to anyone else but me

Wow. A year's gone by. It's hard to remember what happened in the last year. I've left my position at DST Belvedere as Vice President of Development to take a position at The Longview Group, Inc. as Director of Engineering. And... ahhh.. well, not a lot else, I guess.

Comments #29

All - I'm not sure detailed comments make a lot of sense for zines a year or two old, so these will be brief.

The Guest - I agree about keeping comments in. <> Maps done with Microsoft Powerpoint... primitive, perhaps, but it works.

Swashbuckling Mage/Dancing Priestess - Interesting reviews. I wonder how successful an audio CD collection can be, however. Cassettes have the commuter thing going for them; not many people have CD players in their cars yet.

Refugee - Even after all this time, I still remember the One World. Glad to get back to it.

Tales of the Electric Underground - Stunningly detailed traveler question. Who would know the mechanics well enough to possibly answer it?

Rocket Bat - Interesting Con writeup.

The Kethem Campaign II - Background

The standard stuff I put in every month for continuity is in italics.

The Kethem Campaign is a play by Email game; the following write-ups include the game plus background / mechanics used to make it playable and includes my and the player's writing. The campaign scenario is your typical post-holocaust tale. Humanity, once prosperous and technically advanced (magic tech, of course), gets trashed for reasons not clear at the beginning of the campaign. One final bastion of civilizations (Kethem) survives the long night. Now things seem poised on the edge of turning around, and it is time for the adventurous, entrepreneurial types to reclaim mankind's heritage. The question of why the original collapse occurred, and whether the factors... or people... that caused it are still around remains (evil chuckle from the shadows).

The Kethem Campaign II - General Overview

Kethem is at the end of a peninsula. Another peninsula, separated from the Kethem peninsula by an island, Orbaal, and some wide channels, encloses an inner sea, the Lanotalis. At one time during the era of the Lanotalis Empire, humans held the entire area surrounding the Lanotalis sea except the Evael Forest, home of the elves. Five hundred years ago, "the fall" occurred, and human civilization collapsed. Now, Kethem is the only remaining "civilized" area, and this is more because of the social infrastructure than the magic (technical) one, since many of the old skills have been lost. Next to Kethem is Kanday, settled several hundred years before by oriental vikings called the "Siangri" who are from across the wider Cair Sea. Kethem and Kanday have an uneasy truce since joining together for the fourth Orc-Human war over a hundred years ago. On the other side of Kanday is the area known as Pranan, a wild area of independent city states, derived from the same collapsed Lanotalis Empire, but having suffered the yoke of Urakai ownership for four hundred years and still showing the scars. North lies Urakou / Urakai territory. Continuing around the Lanotalis sea, there is Evael, home of the Elves. Beside Evael, and stretching to the other peninsula, is Tawhiem. Tawhiem (again, derived from the Lanotalis Empire) was utterly destroyed by a race of power creatures called the Chen-Kunda, who appeared suddenly and disappeared just as suddenly several hundred years ago. Now, only nomadic tribes roam Tawhiem, although they have established territories that families of tribes traditionally stick too. The other peninsula, called

Kom, is held by the Trolls, large, powerful, but foolish and stupid humanoids.



The Kethem Campaign II - Character Sketches

Glorm - A dwarf, separated from his homeland.

Delrin - A commoner who joined the ranks of the Druids after a strange encounter with a wolf.

El Sid - Gold ring holder of the Great Hold Borgia, a once noble hold with a reputation so tarnished it is treated with disdain by most.

Dom Perginon - El Sid's Sid Kick.

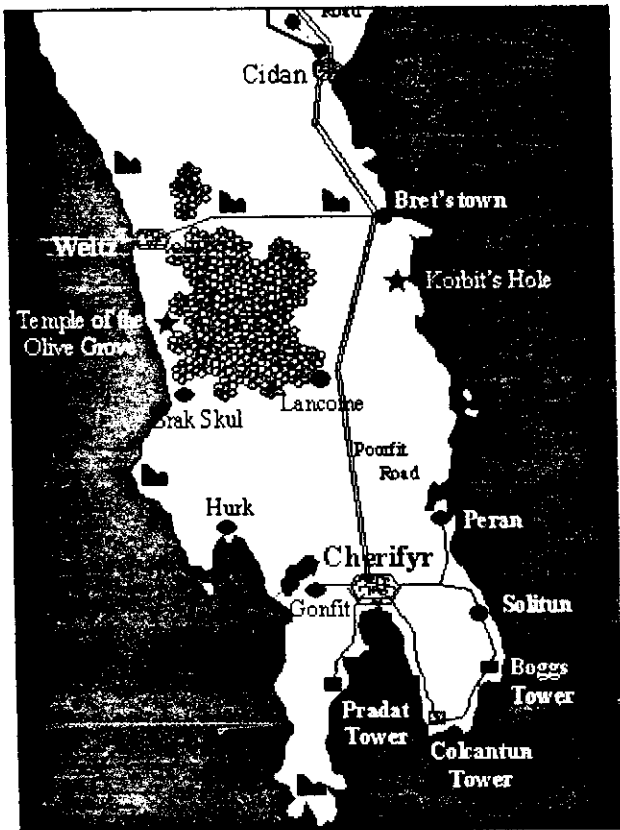
Fuji - the youngest son of a Kanday Lord (Kanday is a Feudal society). His father was killed in a duel, and their Uncle, who inherited the castle, financed their rambling travels to avoid rivalry with his own sons; Tanaka, his brother, died adventuring with the party.

Krinn - Half breed human / Elf, where elves are considered higher life forms that would never dilute their blood on inferior races. A Storm Bull Cleric.

Story to date: The party has departed Cherifyr in some haste, having received news from a disguised Krinn that she was attacked in Hediro and the Dom captured or dead. After a random encounter with Brigands, El Sid and Glorm performed various unsavory experiments on the prisoners with the mysterious stones from the hilt of the sword known as Blackheart, all of which failed. The party arrived safely at Cidan, but did not cover their tracks properly. Glorm, passing by a window, managed to spot cloaked figures approaching the inn in the moonlight.

The Kethem Campaign II

Map of Cherifyr Peninsula in Pranar



SID

...[Laughter, deep and dark...shadows...a Face]... a stealthy, cautious treads[a Voice... promises of Chaos]... a creak of floorboard...the whispered sleeve of an arm reaching...

-- Sid's knife zizzed the air as he rolled up into a crouch, knees bent, offhand back for balance. The razored blade poised at an eviscerating level. His eyes focused in the dim light to see the stiletto's needled point pricking the tip of...

Glorm's bulbous nose. The Dwarf stood frozen, his eyes crossing as he tried to assess the extent of the damage. "Do you **have** to do that?" he asked plaintively. "Can not you call out 'Who's there?' or 'Leave a message with my Service' like every person?" Glorm backed off slowly already ruefully regretting the incipient itch from the papercut-like wound. "I hate it when you do that. You must have had very bad childhood."

Sid's eyes darted over Glorm's head and around the room before resheathing his blade. "You woke me just to discuss my sleeping habits?"

"Well, actually it was half-dozen men I saw sneaking around outside, but since you mention--"

"I thought you were supposed to stay put tonight."

"Ah,...I got bit thirsty. It was the, ah,... low humidity, yes, that be it, the low humidity. Affects my sinuses, too."

"Low humidity. Humidity. Right. Tell me about the men."

"You know. The usual cloaked, masked, low-down, up-to-skulduggery types. Methinks friends of yours."

"Friends of mine you never would have seen, friend Dwarf. Do you have a plan?"

"Well, a thought or two be occurring to me..."

After a few words, the two unlikely leaders agreed on a plan. Fuji was on guard duty, but he had studiously ignored the two dark figures until this point. "Wake the others quietly" said Sid. With quick efficiency Sid stationed the two clerics behind the far two doors. Glorm slipped into the shadows at the far end of the hallway, and Sid chanted off a few quick spells, disappearing near the stairway. Fuji, as instructed, slumped to the floor in the hallway, pretending to be asleep on guard duty. He held the flash sword, which he would discharge to start the fight off. He had reluctantly lent his family blade to Sid. He didn't like the look in Sid's eye as he carefully tested the blade's swing weight. As an afterthought the Sid sent Rosebud out the window, and down to the stables, to see who was left behind to watch for their escape. That done, the group settled in to wait for the latest bandits. As they waited, Glorm slipped the emerald around his neck, and the sapphire into his shield hand. In a pinch he figured he could bring the two stones together in melee.

Fuji waited until the dark figures were nearly upon him before discharging the sword. The effect was fairly dramatic in the poorly lit hallway, and four of the men were looking dazed. Before Fuji could take further action a ball of electricity exploded in the hallway, followed by a crackling bolt. When his vision cleared all of the men were down and only two were moving. Before Fuji could notice anything else Glorm's shadow was moving.

Glorm looked in wonder as the wrath of two gods smote the men to smouldering husks. Miraculously two men were getting up. One was running down the hall towards Sid; Glorm slipped in for a killing blow on the second. Hidden in the shadows, he raised his hammer for a death blow. Too late he noticed the bolt of electricity arcing down the hallway. The bolt took Glorm full in the chest, singing more than a few hairs, but leaving more vital organs untouched. The foolish druid was unseasoned, he thought idly, and afraid, which was understandable, but Glorm could have dismembered the man in seconds. Instead, he motioned to the druid telling him to bind the unconscious figure, and follow with the prisoner as quickly as possible. He looked towards Krinn peeking from the doorway, and said "search em". With that he was heading after the last man, too late of course. He looked up to see a sword arcing out of the shadows. In two quick blows the man was down, and Sid was checking his pockets and weapons. Glorm moved next to Sid quietly, and handed him one of the dead men's cloaks. "Shall we pay a visit to our friends in the stable?" he asked sardonically.

The Sid nodded quietly, a distant look in his eyes. That weird telepathy with his cat, no doubt. "Two, near the far end, with heavy crossbows, swords and small shields by their sides, wearing leather. No obvious magic, but I can't be sure. Additional bolts on their back, not lined up in front of them... a little amateurish. They look nervous... must have heard the lightning ball." That wasn't

surprising; it had been rather loud and Glorm heard yells from downstairs and on the rooms across the way.

"We going to have company in a couple of minutes..." he said nervously.

Sid looked at Glorm for a minute, and said "Out the window. We can slip in behind them from the shadows, and have them down before they can react." As Glorm started moving, Sid quietly chanted a spell to enchant the sword once again. Glorm chuckled; he didn't think he would need any magical help.

They moved quickly to the window that looked over the stables and dropped quietly to the roof a few feet down. Glorm and the Sid scampered across the uneven wooden shingles as quietly as they could, which was irritatingly quiet for the Sid and rather noisy for Glorm. Still, they could hear the horses whinnying and stamping below, obviously sensing from the noise and commotion that something was not quite right, and there was some hope that it would cover any sounds from the roof.

They stopped over the large front door, and Sid pointed to one side, then the other. Glorm quickly moved down one eave while the Sid moved down the other, until they were only eight feet off the ground. The Sid waved once, looking down, waved twice. Glorm jumped on the third, hit with a thud and rolled. He moved a touch faster than the Sid getting in the door and ran with a furious battle cry into one corner, then paused, confused. There was nothing... a missile whistled out of empty air and hit with a thud that was jarring but not debilitating. There WAS a man there, dressed in black leather and with a black cape... how the hell had he missed him??? Glorm closed before the other man could change weapons, and swung, a overhead blow that hit with a satisfying jar and split the man's head open.

H:8 + W/MP:1 + PA:0 + CA:4 - D:11; CP:1 -> 1 x dam

Bad Guy 5 attacks GLORM and hits for 1 times damage doing 8 points

He turned. The Sid had been luckier, or at least if he had taken a bolt it was not obvious, but his man had a sword in hand and they trade blows as he watched, both missing.

He closed quickly, and it clearly distracted the attacker, who missed with a second blow while the Sid connected solidly enough to put the man down, but not out. Glorm jumped and pinned him with the Sid's help. The Sid had a dagger in hand, which he held under the man's chin. The Sid's knife drew a thin line of blood across the gasping man's throat. "You agree you are a Dead Man?" The thugge, eyes bulging, sweating in fear, whispered his assent. "Then repeat the Words. You know them."

"I am a Dead Man, my life and contracts ended," the man croaked, "I am a Live Man, my life and contracts anew."

"Preva Bradford, then."

"Pr-e-v-a Br-a-adford," the hard man's voice shook.

"You are sure? I can end this now. Quickly."

"No," the assassin's voice firmed, "No. I am a Live Man."

"Very well."

A silver pressed the man's hand and he was gone.

Glorm and Sid also slipped from the stable, then sought the roof. "What be that which happened?" Glorm finally asked.

"He's an assassin Low level, but it doesn't matter. Once a contract is accepted, it is slow and painful death to ignore it."

"Why did not we question him?"

"Would have killed him...assassins die before they break. They don't have a choice in the matter."

Glorm reflected for a moment. "But he not accept a contract on our person's?"

"Yes, he did. A Contract is valid until rescinded by the contractor or the death of the assassin"

"Then the words..."

"Ritual. If an assassin is caught with no hope of escape and his death is immediately certain, he is as a Dead Man. By this 'death', his old contracts are canceled. In letting him live, I made him a Live Man again. He became freed from the entanglements of his old contracts and able to accept new ones."

"This be common?"

"No. As I said, he is of low level."

"Lord Sid," Glorm continued carefully, "How you come to be knowing all these ways?"

Sid stopped in the black shadow of a gable, turned. In the darkness, his eyes glowed dangerously feral as they sought those of the Dwarf. Glorm's mouth went dry.

Further response was interrupted by the sounds of hoof beats. Down the street a group riding horses could be seen by moonlight, although details were not obvious in the dim light. From inside there was the twang of a crossbow being discharged. The Sid grimaced. In a normal whisper at odds with his eyes he observed, "It just keeps getting better, doesn't it?" They moved toward a window and reentered the Inn to assist and inform the others...

[The crossbow is a man in robes at the bottom of the stairs that shot at Fuji, who was searching bodies. The bolt missed.]

The Continuing Adventures of the Boyz N Black
Being Wherein Sidney the Vicious lives up to his name
and Fuji (remember Fuji?) lends a hand.

or

What's a nice girl like you doing in an inn like this?
SID

Glorm poked his head halfway out the window and squinted. Determinedly clapping down the lane came a mounted party.

"Be looking to me like the town guard," he said, climbing back out onto the roof. "This be good! I'll go down and explain things. They be helping us for sure!"

The Sid squawked and leapt to collar the knight-errant. Dragging him back in he hissed, "You'll do no such thing! We're strangers in this town and, in case you have *forgotten*, there are *bodies* all over the place! If we're still here when they arrive we'll be arrested for sure!" He shot out the door and jumped corpses down the corridor trailed by the erstwhile Dwarf. "Fire!" he frantically cried pounding down the stairs, "Fire! Fire!"

At the bottom of the stairs, Delrin was riffling bodies as Krinn stood guard with cradled crossbow. Fuji playfully bounced a dark clothed figure's head off the bar. Sid jumped the last half-dozen steps and burst among them and ran for a lamp, "Fire! Fire!"

Krinn caught on instantly. "Oooo!!! F-i-r-e! F-i-r-e!" She pitched a scream in an admirably maidenly voice, "O-o-h! F-i-i-r-r-e!" and whirled in search of fuel.

Fuji's head jerked around. His eyes narrowed. He smiled. "FIRE!" he bellowed like a wounded bull, "\$%@FIRE!" In a flash he vaulted the bar and a limp body slid earthward. Sid dragged a torch off the wall and frantically struck steel to flint to no effect. "Damn cheap faggots!" he cursed mentally, "Damn!" and hurled the stick away. He spun in desperation. And froze in shock! Behind the bar, Fuji hefted a five-gallon cask above his head. "No!" he shouted, recognizing the Inn's lamp oil. "Too much!"

Too late. Arm and shoulder muscles knotting, Fuji swayed back, then jack-knifed his upper body forward. "AIEYAYAYA!" a Kandayan war cry ripped his lips and the cask missed across the room. Wood being no match for cornered stone, the cask shattered as in careened off the top edge of the hearthside. Planks and kerosened fish oil sprayed the banked fire within.

All eyes fixed to the fireplace. There was a sizzle. A sputter. There was a groan. A curse. An imprecation. There was hiss, a mist. "Down!" shouted a diving Sid as a !!k-e-e-r-R-P-L-O-O-S-H!! rent the air and a huge ball of flame exploded out the hearth, gooshing across the room. Flames covered the hearth face. Flaming oil splattered and stuck to every surrounding surface. Wood and coal ash hung as an impenetrable black sooty cloud. "E-e-e-e-e-e--" commenced the Inns fire alarm spell and water began to drizzle from the rooms beamed ceiling. "UELY-UELY-UELY!" undulated a slightly singed but exultant Fuji in an Urakai war cry, "UELY-UELY-UELY!" He capered in victory.

Cries and screams penetrated the attentions of the preoccupied party, this time real ones. Guests, who had wisely kept to the refuge of their rooms when explosions had rudely disturbed their sleep and men began to die in anguish from mortal belly wounds, now responded to the time-honored alarum of "FIRE!" Fire, ever the terror of towns and cities constructed principally of wood, was horror in their hearts. Better to risk a length of steel and bits of spell than burn trapped in their beds. The Inn's dozen-odd other patrons began to spill out of their rooms, shouting and pleading! The innkeeper burst through the kitchen door struggling with a large fire tarp and an underage apprentice. "My inn! My inn!"

"FIRE!" roared Fuji, "FIRE!" and bear-hugged the encumbered man. "No! No! Let me go! My inn!" the hapless keeper struggled to free himself, "Let go!"

"FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!" Fuji countered in glee and slammed the poor man off a wall and back through the kitchen door.

The Sid picked himself up off the floor, coughing black soot, and oriented himself. "Damn that barbarian!" he muttered, "At least he's on our side."

"I think" he amended mentally, as he watched Fuji body-throw the youthful washboy butt-end first through the air to smash through a shuttered window.

"Down!" he cried a second time and slammed into the sawdusted floorboards again. The flames k-e-r-W-O-O-S-H-E-D!!, knifing towards the new oxygen with renewed life. If there was any question of the fire spell's ability to contain the blaze unassisted, this put an end to it. It simply wasn't ensorcelled with this kind of deliberate mayhem in mind! "Fire!%&*Fire@*!" Fuji continued to choke out, kicking and hurling chairs, stools and the odd table into the conflagration.

The Sid rolled onto his back and tried to clear stars from his head. His eyes came to focus on a ceiling licking with flames. K-e-r-A-A-C-K! and one of the ceiling beams gave up, sagged. The fire alarm petered into silence. "A-y-e-e! FIRE!" screamed a suddenly motivated Sid. He rocketed in the general direction of the kitchen door. "FIRE!" and collided with a still whooping Fuji, guided by sound. He pulled him backwards out the door, through the utter chaos of the swirling bodies and smoke.

Emerging coughing into the relatively clearer air of the kitchen, he saw that the innkeeper had apparently resigned himself to the loss of his livelihood. He now struggled mightily to empty the cellar of valuable foods, casks of wine, brandy and platterware. His wife, the two maids, and Glorm, were assisting. He heard rather than saw the thudding of several guests and their belongings from the second story into the stableyard behind the inn. "Come on, you," he growled at a now silent but grinning Fuji. "If we don't make it, I suppose we can try claiming that a country boy simply panicked in the Big City." He slid one hand through Glorm's belt from behind and surreptitiously grabbed a lamp with the other. The three men made their way through the smoke and confusion out the back door.

Emerging into the stableyard covered in soot and coughing, the Sid still managed a piercing whistle. Immediately came the muffled cry of a mighty warhorse and the banging of heavy hooves on wood, and splintering. Releasing Glorm, the other two men raced to the stable and through the door. Carefully sheltering the flame, Sid knelt lamp to pile of straw and another conflagration began. Johnny Rotten emerged from the darkness to the rear, having disassembled his stall in detail. He carried his bridle in his teeth.

Pushing an armload of their gear into Fuji's arms, Sid told him to load the charger and make for the west of town. He then raced from stall to stall freeing the now screaming

horses, mules, donkey and the odd goat or two. This was less motivated less by compassion for the innocent animals than by a desire to increase the confusion outside.

Fire-maddened animals burst through the stable door to mill, rear and buck in the courtyard beyond. New screams of terror and pain came as several hapless tenants had arm, rib or leg shattered like matchsticks.

A proud warbeast from hell, black as coal, eyes flaming red, high-stepped through the stable door. Lined in firelight, an equally coal black demon sat astride him. A frightening Urakai cry split the night, "UELY-UELY-UELY!" and the monstrous twosome crushed humans and animals aside to pound into the night.

Unseen, something that could just have been smoke slipped around the stable door, into deepest shadows and was gone. An eyeblink slipped around the stable door and into deepest shadow. Two small green eyes glowed. Then there was nothing.

Later as they wound their way into the wilds to the west of town, the party paused on a small rise to gaze back upon civilization. In the dawning light, dense gray-black smoke rose skyward, underlit with an orange-red glow. The Sid reflected upon the many dead assassins, the destroyed livelihood of the innkeeper, and of his family and dependents. For them, starvation now threatened. He reflected upon the broken, possibly crippled, bodies of the inn's other guests. He reflected upon all these newly ruined lives. All so unnecessary. A tear rolled down a soot-blackened cheek.

He turned away, reshouldering his load with one arm and slapping Fuji's back with the other. Damn, he shook his head, he hadn't had this much fun in years.

He felt like a kid again.

August 25th

They gathered around the campfire, ten miles west of Cidan and in a small gully that should keep them from being spotted. The fire had covered their tracks well, with the riders, who had turned out to be redcloaks, joining in the attempts to save the inn rather than pursuing intruders.

Glorm quickly and skillfully joined the metal band together, locking the emerald in place, then looked at his handiwork. The jumping cat with the Emerald eyes that formed the hilt of Tanaka's sword now had a thin silver band around the beast's waist holding the Blackheart gems on opposite sides of the handle. El Sid, Krinn, and Delrin looked on with interest.

"It be done."

El Sid looked on, a distance expression on his face. "Nothing obvious. Another good idea for getting the stones to do something interesting, but nothing obvious. Maybe it needs to be blooded?"

Krinn frowned. "I don't know. It clearly didn't require it in the vision you told me about." The Sid frowned as if he

was still unsure telling her about Blackheart was the right thing to do.

"Try to pick it up" suggested Delrin.

Glorm picked up the sword, swung it gently one way, then the other, suddenly fell to one knee with a gasp. Everyone stepped back one step.

Glorm rose back to his feet, and looked at the party under hooded brows. Everyone stepped back another step. "He he he he" Glorm tittered uncharacteristically. Delrin stepped back two steps, tripping over a branch, then scrambled back up again in a classic pre-flight position.

"Glorm?" asked the Sid carefully.

"Me be not Glorm, but BLACKHEART." Another titter.

"Oh, shit" said Krinn, turning white.

A laugh.

Delrin scrambled backwards and fell over again.

A guffaw.

El Sid looked more carefully. "Glorm?" he said hesitantly.

"No, be I Black... bla..." he he he... "Be I..." he he HO HO HO he he.. Glorm finally collapsed in bouts of hysterical laughter. "You... you... you should be seeing your faces..." and he collapsed in laughter again.

El Sid gritted his teeth. "VERY." "FUNNY." Glorm stopped laughing, but shook slightly as he tried to swallow his mirth. El Sid let out his breath with an exasperated sigh. "OK, you've had your joke. What about the sword?"

Glorm swung the weapon around more seriously. "Nice balance. Feels good. Why don't Fuji try?"

Fuji took the sword and did the elaborate half-dance of a professional sword fighter warming up. "It IS better" he replied. "Stone skimming water" he called, and the sword swung a tight flat arc in front of him. "Wind rustles reeds" and the sword swung in a overhead arc, switched hands on the downswing, arced again, switched hands on the downswing, arced again, all in one continuous motion that looked deadly and graceful. "Tree dies in agony WHUUUNCK." The tree to the side of Fuji stood long enough that Krinn thought that she imagined the sword passing through it. Then it slowly toppled to the ground. "Head of..."

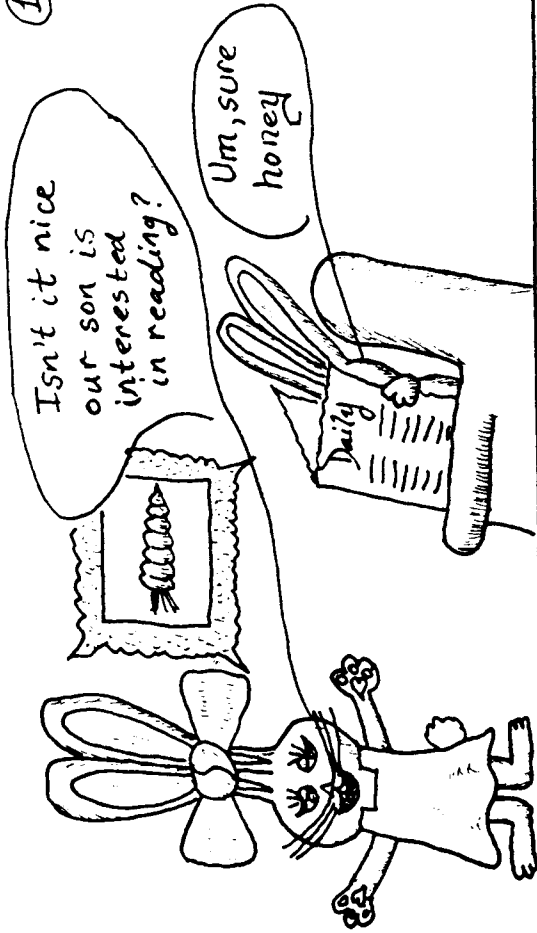
"We get the idea" called the Sid. He motioned to Fuji, then took the sword himself and took a few practice swings. "Nice. I wonder if the sword, or the death spell, is more valuable? To bad it won't do both." He pointed the sword at a squirrel. "Die."

The squirrel toppled over.

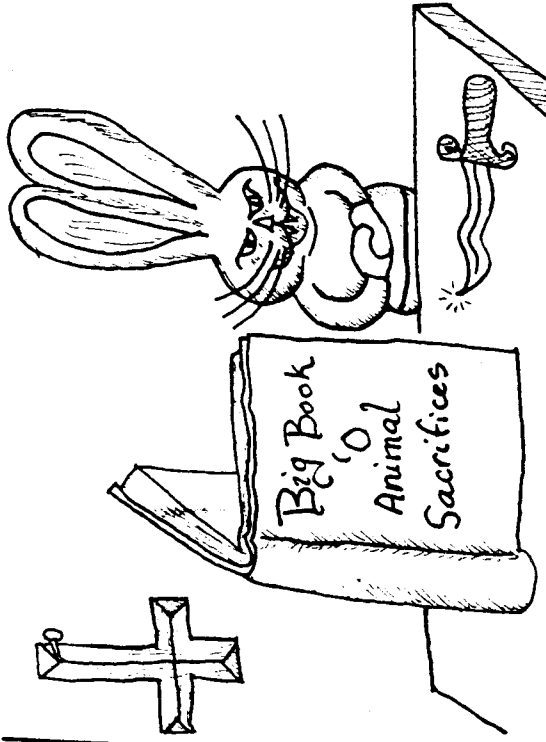
Glorm looked disapprovingly at the Sid. "It works only once a day. At least you could have gone for something with some meat on it for dinner..."

To Be Continued...

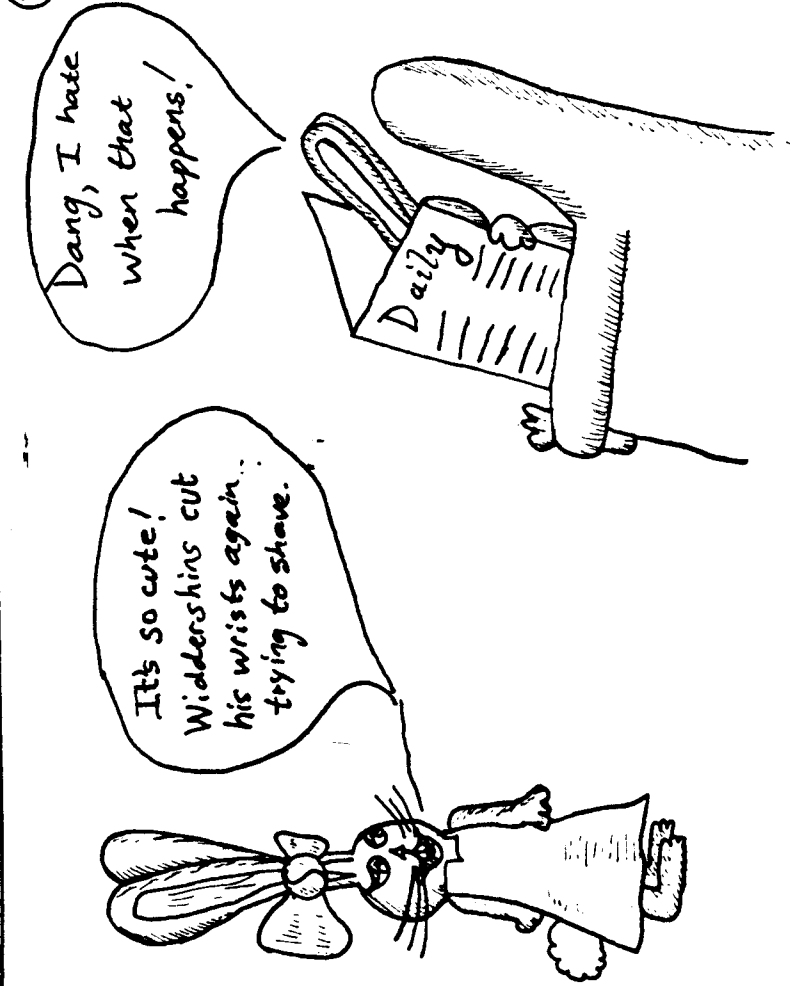
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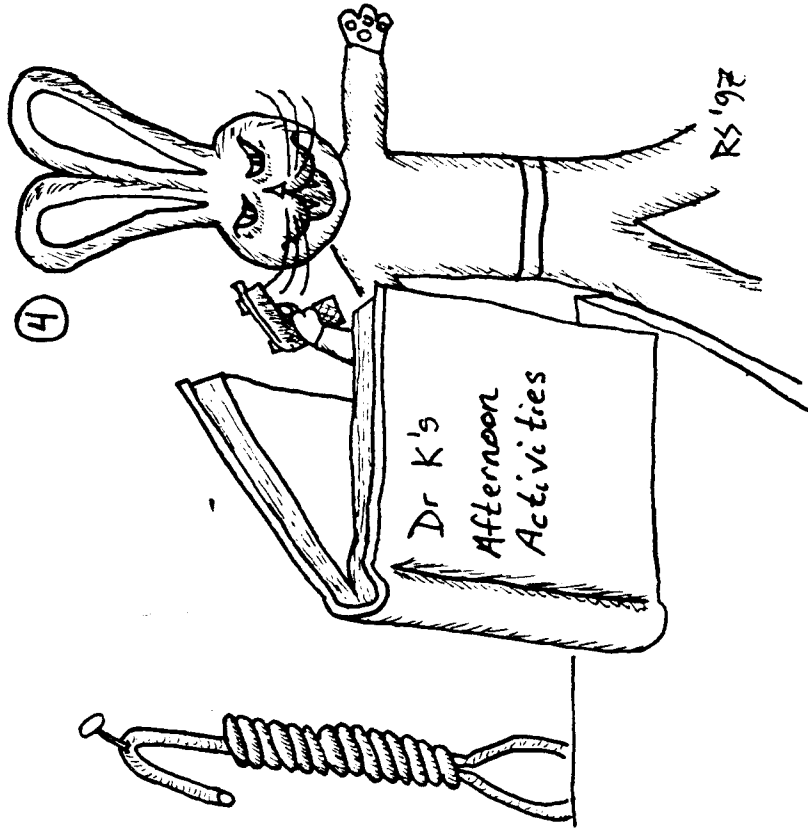
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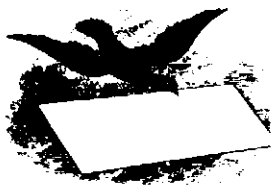


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RS '97

Staple side



Words on the Wing

ISSUE #1

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An Introduction to Cindy Shettle

Many of you may already know me, since I have written for Interregnum before, as well as roleplaying with the previous editor and living with the new editor. However, this is the first issue in which I have had my own 'zine, rather than adding a page or two to "The Swashbuckling Mage and the Dancing Priestess", so I feel obligated to introduce myself.

I've been roleplaying since junior high and have been interested in fantasy and science fiction for as long as I can remember. My favorite television show is Highlander, especially the character of Adam Pierson/Methos. My second favorite character from the show is Amanda and I watch her spin-off series, Highlander: the Raven, faithfully, in spite of the late hour my local station chooses to air it.

I've been a member of the PWFC (Peter Wingfield Fan Club) since very close to when it began. (The founders decided they wanted to start a club on the way from a convention in October of '95. I joined in November and the official announcement occurred in December, timed to coincide with Methos' fourth episode, "Chivalry".) I enjoy writing Highlander fanfic and, while I don't have time in the middle of tax season (I work for a CPA.) to write a new story, I've included a previously written, but still unpublished, story in this issue.

My first roleplaying game was Basic Dungeons & Dragons. My goal was to find a unicorn, not to slay monsters, so I had a bow and a quiver of arrows as all the weapons carried by the party of three characters I was

running. In Basic D & D, all elves were automatically fighter/magic-users, but there weren't any rules for elves to learn or casts spells. Similarly, Basic D&D required clerics to reach 2nd level before getting spells, so I had an entire party of "spellcasters", but only one spell among them.

In the first playing session, my characters walked into a dungeon. Upon opening a door out of a room they were in, they discovered a monster. (I think it was a goblin or orc or some such, or maybe a couple of them.) Being rather unprepared to deal with such, they slammed the door in its face. My elf then ran across the room to get the distance need to shoot his bow while the other two tried to stay out of the way.

We never got beyond that as the D&D set we were using belonged to the school. Someone else had decided to start a gaming group and threw out everything from our game except the little posterboard figures I had drawn of my elf and magic-user characters. I then did what any reasonable person would - I joined their group, thus gaining access both to other players and to a DM who knew more about the game than I did.

Throughout high school, I primarily played AD&D in groups that other people had formed and I found out about through word of mouth. The summer program I went to during high school was called Exploration. It had two three week sessions and I went to both sessions every summer. One year, I was in a gaming group where the GM was only there for the first session, but the rest of us

were there for both.

I don't think we actually got any roleplaying done during the second session, but we got together, took a look at everyone's favorite gaming system and wrote up characters that we ended up not using. That may not seem very exciting, but it was significant, since it was my first exposure to non-TSR games and it convinced me to get my own copies of Villains and Vigilantes and Spell Law. The later I didn't do much with, since I didn't have the rest of the mechanics, but I GMed a couple of V&V sessions for my best friend.

In college, I formed a roleplaying group by recruiting friends, starting with my roommate, Kiralee. We played D&D every week in a lounge area in my college dorm and I was the DM. If I remember correctly, the group lasted for most of the school year. At the beginning of second semester, we gained a new player and I moved the campaign to a different part of the map.

Wellesley College had a three week Wintersession between Christmas break and second semester which coincided with the first three of MIT's four week equivalent. My freshman year I found a roleplaying group on MIT's schedule. Unfortunately, the GMs weren't very good.

For Call of Cthulhu, they had us each write up two characters. Mine were an heiress and a cat-burglar who were identical twins, separated at birth. I wanted to play the cat-burglar, but the GMs made me play the heiress, promising that I could switch to the more competent character once we started play. However, almost the first thing they did was to cut off all traffic between the island where the game was set and the outside world.

Their Champions game was even worse. They didn't want to be bothered with explaining the rules to a new player, so I had no knowledge of Limitations, Power Structures or END Costs or the typical levels

of effective powers. My "superheroine" on her first phase managed to roll nearly maximum damage on her attack (I think it was 17 STUN, which would make it 5 BODY. I know it was a 3d6 attack, which sounded like a lot of damage, based on my D&D experience.) and the villain she had hit didn't even notice. By her second phase, she was nearly out of END and hid under a table with her DNPC.

I've never cared for the horror genre to begin with and what little I knew about the Call of Cthulhu magic system didn't impress me. (From what I could tell, it mostly boils down to the fact that it should be in the hands of PCs. PCs can learn and cast spells, but doing so eventually drives them insane and insane characters get taken over by the GM.) But Champions sounded interesting and I purchased my own copy, so I could read the rules and try to figure out what the GMs hadn't told me that made my character not work.

Kiralee and I played with other people on and off for the rest of college, but the only lasting game we were in was a free-form one with just the two of us. Not everyone might agree that it was a roleplaying game, since the rules were fairly loose, especially at the beginning, but I don't think it qualifies as anything else either.

It wasn't writing, because we didn't have any plot in mind that we were trying to follow. Also, while we sometimes could and did, go back and change something, doing so would always create an entirely new timeline. Editing just one paragraph was completely out of the question. (Admittedly, it didn't matter much, because most of it wasn't written down to begin with.) And it wasn't improvisation since there was no time limit on deciding what your next line or action was going to be.

After college, we found a GURPS group through a sign posted in a local store and we played with them for a while. There were some personality conflicts between me

and some of the other players which resulting in Kiralee and I leaving the group, but the GM agree to run a separate game for the two of us one night after work. Unfortunately, the typical evening for that began with the three of us and the GM's girlfriend all meeting for dinner, then deciding that there wasn't enough time left to play.

But I still kept in touch with the GM, even after we stopped playing with him. My parents had gotten me a modem for Christmas and I need someone to call with it and he ran a BBS. Kiralee and I were part of a roleplaying group that formed on the BBS. Someone posted that they wanted to form a

group and everyone else said they were interested. We managed to agree on a game system, a DM, a schedule and a location before meeting face to face.

Even after we started playing, we continued our electronic communication. The sysop let us have a private room on his BBS for our in between session discussions. With me and one other player out unemployed and calling the BBS three times a day or more, our private room had the most traffic of any on the board. That group eventually broke up. I found Joe's gaming group through the same BBS and have been roleplaying with him ever since.

Forming a Gaming Group

As I mentioned in my introduction, I managed to form a group by word of mouth and have joined others the same way. That method does have some advantages since it produces players that you already know or come recommended by someone you know. It's also the best way to get players who are new, not only to your group, but to roleplaying in general. However, each of us only knows so many people. Once you've asked all your friends and all your friends' friends, you've pretty much exhausted this method.

You can still post electronic messages looking for players, but now that the Internet has replaced BBSes, it's a lot harder to get people's attention there. Maybe the newsgroup has a couple thousand readers instead of a couple dozen, but what good does that do you when they're in California, Texas or England and your game is in Massachusetts? Even if the providers don't delete your post and it reaches all your prospective gamers, it may still get lost amid the sheer volume of posts to the average newsgroup.

Still, the Internet can be useful because e-mail and private mailing lists can be used to keep in contact between games.

And, unlike the small BBSes that I used, you don't have to get off in order for everyone else to be able to read your messages. Recently we have been using flyers left in local stores that sell RPG books to attract players. But we put our e-mail address on the flyers, so that players can e-mail us instead of calling.

After players, I think the next most important element of a gaming group is a regular meeting schedule. Obviously, having a GM and a game system are important too, but you can switch GMs or systems or even play board and card games for a few weeks while still holding the group together. However, in my experience, groups that meet "whenever everyone has time," tend not to meet more than two or three times before falling apart.

The situation where all the players live together usually doesn't work any better at this. It's too easy to put it off because you know you can always play later. Or you decide not to disturb the other players because they appear to be the middle of something. Also, consider the possibility that if you're too busy to follow a regular schedule, you might be too busy to play.

Living with the other players does produce exceptions to this rule, but those seem to end up working too well. The free-form game I had with Kiralee was one of these. We played regularly and it lasted a very long time, but there were a lot of times when we hardly ever stopped playing. We'd play while eating, instead of doing homework

and we'd continue in bed after turning the lights out. Still, if they're kept under control, side runs can have a place within a campaign. They allow a player character to do something that only involves them that may be a bit too time consuming to handle while everyone else is sitting around twiddling their thumbs.

Comments on Issue #29

The Editor's Soapbox

I like the idea of designing a world and would be interested in contributing. I've enjoyed the "Build a World" panels at Arisia, but the time scale involved with Interregnum would make it difficult, if not impossible, to go about it the same way. Under ideal circumstances, a simple yes or no question that could be decided with a show of hands would take three months - one issue to ask the question and another to vote on it. However, questions are rarely simple and circumstances are almost never ideal.

Using the world that you've already come up with as a starting place might work better than designing something from scratch. Six different inns or villains or spells can coexist in the same world quite easily. Six different systems of magic, including one that says magic doesn't work at all, would require a lot of work to reach a compromise that satisfies everyone. However, I want to see your world before I agree that I like it enough to use, especially since I'm under the impression that it's already more fully developed than what we'd normally have at the end of a "Build a World" panel.

Two, or maybe three, topics sounds like a good idea, but I don't think we want more than that. Presumably, people would have the option to write about more than one topic if they wanted to, but not even the editor would be required to write about all of them. That would enable the editor to accept interesting sounding topic suggestions from other writers, even if she didn't have anything to say on the subject herself.

The Guest

I agree with you that we should keep the comments. If new readers are confused by "in jokes" or on-going conversations, they can always ask someone. Glancing through the issue I'm holding right now, I noticed that all the 'zines contain at least one form of contact information for the author. If the new person decides to contribute, they could, instead, include their questions in the comments section of their zine.

Eric Zylstra's view of extra-planar creatures is, in my opinion, much too simplistic. For starters, the concepts of "good" and "evil" are highly subjective. If your character is pagan then, from his perspective, angels are probably at least hostile, if not actually evil. He is also ignoring the possibility of "neutral" creatures or a pantheon of deities who all live on the same plane of existence, regardless of alignment.

There is a situation that the new version of your rule doesn't cover, which is: "Never sell your first born child, even if you know you can't have one." Admittedly, that probably doesn't come up very often, but I was in a game where a character sold her first born child to the fae. It seemed obvious that she couldn't have one since, besides being a lesbian, she had the negative trait, "Sterile." However, she was actually already pregnant at the time, with the grandson of a major demon, which had been implanted in her womb by a minor demon in the form of clothing worn by a female character she had had sex with a couple of times.

Tales from the Electric Underground

I didn't like Fuzion either. The background/origin tables are kind of interesting if you want to design a super-hero genre character, but don't have any ideas. You do have to be willing to be flexible about applying the results, though. Their simplified mechanics, however, don't appear any easier to use, but make it harder to design interesting characters.

Your rules for adding Christian magic to Call of Cthulhu looked like something I'd want to try in the unlikely event that I ever play again. I realize that Chaosium isn't responsible for either the fact that I don't particularly care for the horror genre or the fact that I had a bad GM for the only scenario I tried. But I did dislike the unavailability of magic to starting PCs, as well as the fact that learning or casting spells caused insanity. While I don't normally play extremely Christian characters, I agree that there's a certain amount of illogic in requiring priests to use "tainted" magic in order to be effective.

"The Adventure of the Whispering Hill" seemed interesting, though not designed for the only Pendragon character I've written up. What she'd be seeking would be magic, something the voice itself would qualify as, whether or not she made a Worldly trait roll. Requiring a critical success to make out what the voices are saying seems a bit difficult

since the entire rest of the adventure depends on someone not only doing so, but failing another die roll after that.

Perhaps those who recognize the voices on the first roll should be allowed a second roll with success on that allowing those characters to understand the voices. (Though characters who failed the first roll would still need a critical success to do so.) If everyone still fails their Alertness rolls (or makes their Worldly rolls) the shadowy figures should do something. Perhaps another Alertness roll could allow characters to see them darting down the hill towards the door that has opened.

Since you obviously know something about the Pendragon magic rules, I'd like to ask you a few questions. How many spells can a PC normally start with? (My GM, who didn't have the magic supplement only allowed my character one - a Healing spell only slightly better than First Aid and not cumulative with it.) Are there any official rules for characters with fae blood? I suggested some minor modifications to my attributes and used it as the justification for having magic. Also, I disliked the random generation of personality. Have you come up with any alternatives? My character, as a female non-knight, seemed good mostly for patching up the others after combat though, I suspect, more effective magic would have altered the balance.

Playing to Stalemate

by Cynthia A Shettle
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This story is a work of Highlander fan-fiction, a non-profit, amateur piece done without the permission of Rysher Entertainment. It is in no way intended to infringe upon Rysher's rights to their world or characters. Please notify me before publishing it elsewhere, whether electronically or in print. Updates on my

other work are available on my fiction page at <http://www.fantasyrealms.simplenet.com/fanfic.htm>.

Note that because of when this story was written, it does not take into account any episode that aired in the fifth season or later. I have decided that the changes that would be required to accommodate those episodes

would alter the story too much. Besides, this story was never intended to be part of the "real" Highlander timeline to begin with.

Amanda sensed an Immortal approaching her hotel room. Duncan? No, paranoia was running rampant this late in the Game. He would have called first... unless he was coming for her head. The thought chilled her. Drawing her sword, she cautiously opened the door a crack. When nobody attempted entrance, Amanda slowly increased the size of the opening, carefully extending her weapon out before her head.

A familiar voice whispered, "Put your sword away. I'm just here to talk."

Peering in that direction, Amanda spotted a man up against the wall. He was wearing a trench coat that still concealed his sword. The hat and sunglasses were apparently a feeble attempt at a disguise, but she recognized him anyway. "Methos?"

"Shhh. They think I'm dead." Methos looked around nervously. "I'd rather keep it that way for the moment."

"Who does?" Amanda stepped half way into the hall, looking around herself. She didn't see anyone else.

"May I *please* come in before someone sees me?" Methos somehow managed to convey the full force of his irritation without raising his voice above a whisper.

Amanda suddenly realized that he was referring to the Watchers. With it came the revelation that Methos was currently more afraid of being unmasked by them than he was of being beheaded by her. That meant he was sincere in his claim of wanting to talk. Sheathing her sword, she gestured for him to enter.

Methos continued to check about

uneasily, but as he ignored her in his search, it lent further credence to his peaceful intent. Finally satisfied, he sat down on the bed.

"What's this about?" Amanda prompted.

"The Prize." Methos sighed. "I'm here to convince you that you don't really have any use for it."

"Who wouldn't want ultimate knowledge and power?" Amanda asked, incredulously.

"I don't for one. Neither would you, if you'd stop to think about it." He looked at her seriously, trembling inside as he revealed himself more than he normally considered wise to such an obvious potential foe. "You live for excitement like I live for knowledge. You have as much use for omnipotence as I do for omniscience. It would be a lot of fun for a decade or two. After that we'd be bored to tears."

Amanda considered this thoughtfully. Methos was probably right. He seemed to know her better than she knew herself. Of course, Methos had probably used his Watcher connections to read her file. Still that didn't change everything. "Even if I don't want the Prize, it's certainly better than dying. If you think I'm going to *let* you take my head..."

"I am *not* going to kill you," Methos insisted with a firmness that defied the situation.

Catching the implications, Amanda stared at him. "There can be only one. You know that better than anyone."

"Why?"

That seemed obvious. "Because you're the oldest Immortal."

Methos shook his head. "That means I've known longer than anyone, not better. I

still have no idea why." He looked at her pointedly. "Do you?"

Amanda realized she had been answering the wrong question. She shook her head. "But what difference does that make now? This is the Gathering!"

"That I *do* know better than anyone." Methos sighed and looked away. "We have a bulletin board at headquarters with only seven names on it." He turned to gaze at Amanda intently. "There are only *eight* of us left alive."

It took Amanda a few seconds to deduce the source of the discrepancy. The Watchers thought Methos was dead, therefore they didn't include him in the continually shrinking list of those Immortals still living. It had shrunk a lot more than Amanda had realized. "So that's you, me..." She trailed off as Methos shook his head at the anticipated next person on the list.

"That's the other reason I'm here." Methos closed his eyes. "He didn't make it. They took his name down this morning."

"Just give me the name of the bastard who did it and I'll..."

"Get yourself killed in a misguided attempt at revenge," Methos finished, staring at her.

"So what do you expect me to do?"

"Work with me. Together, I think we have a good chance, especially since it's the last thing anyone will expect this late in the Game. I know it's supposedly against the rules, but desperate times call for desperate measures and I know you've done it before."

Team up with another Immortal? In the middle of the Gathering? It was so crazy it just might work. But there was still a nagging detail. "Who gets the Quickenings?"

Methos shook his head. "Whoever gets them, gets them. It doesn't matter." He looked at Amanda. "Probably the best strategy is for one of us to challenge them while the other sneaks up and takes their heads. Since I'm better at fighting and you're better at sneaking..."

"You'd let me steal your kills?" Amanda stared at Methos incredulously.

"I'm not going to deliberately stall until you get there. If I see an opening, I'm going to take it. But if you see one first..." He shrugged. "The only thing I'm concerned about is you taking too long and letting me get killed."

"You're being entirely too causal about this! Why doesn't it matter to you who gets the Quickenings?"

Methos sighed. He had never told anyone, but if was ever going to trust another Immortal with the information, it had to be now. "Any Immortal within range will get part of the Quickening. Whomever actually makes the kill gets the largest share, but..." He shrugged. "I already have a lot more energy than you anyway."

Amanda considered this carefully. The explanation was difficult to accept. If anyone else had proposed it, she'd probably laugh out loud. "How do you know this?"

"Careful observation over thousands of years with senses diligently honed to be more acute than you ever dreamed possible."

After staring at Methos a moment longer, Amanda decided that she could accept it as an explanation as to why he didn't care if he got the Quickenings. If he had been trying to convince her to let him have them, it might be a different story, but there didn't seem any logical reason for Methos to be lying in this fashion. "Okay," she said at last. "I'll ally with you."

Methos nodded. "I have a few of

things I need to take care of. I'll be back in a couple of hours and we can get started." He rose from the bed and turned to leave the room.

"He's really dead, isn't he?" The thought brought tears to Amanda's eyes as the sudden lack of any more pressing concerns allowed the grief she had been suppressing to come rushing out.

"I'm sorry. I wish he weren't." Methos reached out to place a gentle hand on her shoulder. Amanda instinctively responded by pulling herself closer to the offer of comfort. Methos held her a minute, giving a soft smile when her hand started to wander. He'd had a few fantasies about Amanda, like anyone with male hormones would, but that's all they were - fantasies. There were all kinds of reasons why he shouldn't get involved with Amanda. But when he tried to remember them, Methos realized that the deal they had just made rendered all of them inapplicable or inevitable. Still, he did have things to do. Reluctantly, he pulled back. "There'll be time for this later. If we succeed, we'll have all the time in the world."

"And if we don't?"

"It won't be because we didn't try. We need one more ally and I left all of my files at home."

"Who else is there that we can trust?" Amanda couldn't think of another Immortal she even liked who was still alive.

Methos shook his head. "Not another Immortal, another... A Watcher." Like it or not, rejoining the Game would sign Adam Pierson's resignation.

Amanda nodded understanding.
"Joe."

"I'll be back as soon as I can." He brushed a tear off Amanda's cheek and, without another word, left her room.

Joe heard the knock on his door, but ignored it. It was less than three hours since he had witnessed the death of Duncan MacLeod and he felt he deserved to be alone.

His visitor obviously didn't since he knocked again. "He was my friend too."

The voice was muffled, but still recognizable. "Adam?"

"Let me in or you'll have two more dead friends to mourn over."

Two? Methos was still concerned about another at this stage of the Game? Reluctantly admitting that the Immortal Watcher had caught his attention, Joe called out, "Hold on a minute," as he reached for the artificial limbs he needed to reach the door.

When he finally got the door open, he asked Methos, "I presume you're one of them, but who's the other?"

"Amanda."

"But she's an Immortal!"

"So I've noticed," Methos replied dryly.

"But..."

"We've agreed not to kill each other. Neither of us wants the Prize and we're going to work together to make sure no one else gets it either." Methos looked at Joe. "And before you make any remarks about the rules of the Game, keep in mind that all of our opposition have done a *lot* worse and that if we don't win, one of them will."

Joe sighed. "What do you need me to do?"

"I've managed to gather the current addresses for all the other Immortals, but they're not going to stay put. We'll need

updates, especially of any deaths." Methos took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "But what we really need your help with isn't the other Immortals."

"Who else is there?"

"The Watchers. It was chaos when I left headquarters. Horton's followers were out in force, preaching the end of the world and recruiting almost openly."

Joe shook his head in denial. "No, it can't really be that bad."

"Do you blame them? As far as they know, Amanda is the nicest Immortal still alive and, even if they wanted a thief in charge of the planet, she's probably the worst fighter of all the Immortals left alive. Hell, if I were really Adam Pierson, I'd join them."

Joe nodded. "I'll do my best to keep them from going after the two of you." Logically, as the only good guys left, they should be low on the list of targets if the renegades did go head hunting, but the renegades had never been high in terms of logic. Besides, if there was any truth to their claim that killing enough Immortals prevented the Prize from being won at all, then the still living Methos would top the list. "I'll... I'll see you. Good luck, Adam."

They had Adam's hand written notes and computer printouts spread out all over Amanda's bed. Besides the seven Immortals still believed to be alive, there were sheets covering the last half dozen to die. While Adam had been aware that Methos was still alive, he had not been motivated to keep a record of his own movements, so those pages were conspicuously absent.

Amanda held up one of Hedeon Chapaev's pages. "We should go after him first."

"No," Methos retorted firmly. "Since

he's the best fighter and most powerful Immortal of all our opponents, we are going to save him for last."

"He killed Duncan. We have to..."

"We *will* avenge MacLeod's death, but that is *not* our first priority. If we are following my plan, we will do it my way. If you don't like my plan, you're perfectly welcome to go on a suicide run while I retreat to the Watchers to come up with a back up."

Amanda gave in reluctantly. As much as she hated to admit it, she needed the older Immortal's help more than he needed hers.

"Now, we are going to start with the easiest targets and then use the power we take from them against the stronger ones. If we act fast enough, Joe should be able to prevent the renegade Watchers from coming after us until it's over." When Amanda nodded, he began picking up the papers. "Let's go."

First on the list was Morel Vitalis. He was so surprised to find a mythical being on his doorstep that he barely fought back and Methos was able to dispatch him with ease. Afterwards, the victor wondered how the deceased Immortal had gotten even this far.

Amanda didn't know. "You're the one with the Watcher files."

They were half way to Vencel Balogh's last known location when Joe called to tell them it was unnecessary. Chapaev had beaten them to him.

It wasn't the lost energy that bothered Methos most, though. Hanging up the cellular phone, he shook his head and muttered, "I didn't know."

"Didn't know what?" Amanda asked

curiously.

Methos looked at his passenger carefully before answering. "That another Immortal had died."

"Why would..." Amanda remembered Methos telling her that his senses were unbelievably acute. "You can really sense that?"

Shaking his head, the older Immortal replied, "Only during the past three months." But thinking about it, it did make sense that it wouldn't work any more. Receiving a Quickening always was somewhat disorienting to the fine tuning of his senses while the presence of another Immortal reduced his sensitivity to faint signals. And, of course, his actions in reentering the Game meant the Gathering no longer had to provoke him into doing so. Since none of the possible explanations he had come up with still applied, there was no reason he should be able to detect the deaths of other Immortals at a distance. It was still somewhat disconcerting to discover.

The fight with Mikkel Fabricus went off exactly as they planned it. Methos challenged him and, while the eldest Immortal held his attention, the beautiful thief stole his head from behind.

The report from Joe wasn't promising though. "We almost had the other Watchers convinced that you were their salvation, but this set them off again. The only thing that saved you is that when it came down to it, they decided to take logic over appearances. You couldn't want Amanda to interfere in your fights, therefore she did it without your approval. They're still trying to figure out why you're driving around together." Joe paused for a moment as if listening to something. "Hold on a minute."

After a much longer pause, Joe returned with more news. "It looks like Kivi found Dolinski before you did. They're fighting now."

They arrived in time to see Oskari Kivi behead his opponent. As the fireworks began, Amanda looked at Methos who shrugged. Absorbing a Quickening caused a temporary overload of even the least sensitive Immortal's senses. Kivi didn't notice Amanda until she was practically on top of him.

Not being involved himself, Methos was free to observe the look of horror that crossed the face of the only Watcher visible from his vantage point. He turned away in disgust. Methos and Amanda were doing things this way because they had to, not because they wanted to. Why couldn't the mortals they protected understand that?

It was down to just three now. Methos and Amanda drove in grim silence to what they hoped would be the last hostile encounter between Immortals. Once Chapaev was taken care of, the two remaining would be free to do whatever they wanted... forever.

First, they had a major challenge ahead of them. Chapaev was the most skilled and most powerful of their opponents, the reason they had saved him for last. Chapaev had managed to defeat MacLeod and Methos had spent too much time in hiding to be at MacLeod's level of skill. While Amanda had not run from the Game, she did spend most of her time in other pursuits and wasn't even as good as her older partner. They only hoped that together they would be able to defeat their opponent.

Chapaev had sensed them coming. He watched them getting out of the car, swords at the ready. "I see you found some chump to champion you until the last," he commented to Amanda. "As amusing as it would be for him to turn on you later, I'm afraid I'm going to have to disappoint you by beating him." He gave an evil grin. "But if you'd like, I'll consider giving you a chance to work your wiles on me before you join him."

"I don't think you realize who I am,"

Methos stated calmly.

Turning back to his approaching foe, Chapaev commented, "Well, you look like a schoolboy with a crush, but I'll assume you wouldn't have made it this far if you didn't have a few centuries under your belt. Go ahead and enlighten me. I'd like to know who's giving me the Prize."

"A few centuries?" The ancient Immortal laughed, though he didn't feel amused. "Try a few millennia. My name is Methos."

"Methos?" It was Chapaev's turn to laugh. "He's been dead for centuries, if he ever existed to begin with."

"Not dead, just hiding," Methos replied.

"Well, if you've been hiding, then you must be out of practice." Chapaev tried to prove this by catching the ancient Immortal off guard, but Methos parried his first swing with ease.

"You'll have to do better than that," Methos taunted, giving a swing of his own as he began to slowly circle around his foe.

Chapaev seemed to be falling for their plan. Busy exchanging blows with Methos, he allowed his attention to be diverted from the apparent bystander. He mistook the eldest opponent's timid strokes and primarily defensive style as signs of fear and weakness. The thought that Amanda was there as anything other than a witness never occurred to him until he felt her blade in his shoulder.

"Damn!" she swore. She had missed Chapaev's neck by mere inches. If he hadn't moved just as she swung...

It was his off hand, but still Chapaev was not happy. "No two against one," he reminded Amanda, turning slightly to get a glimpse of his new opponent.

Methos took advantage of the other Immortal's distraction to make a swing that Chapaev barely avoided. "You're a fine one to quote rules. How many Immortals have you shot and then taken their heads while they were down?"

It was only five times and only when he was most desperate. Chapaev was that desperate now, but his gun was at home. However, there was a more important aspect to the circumstances under which the events had occurred. "There were no witnesses," Chapaev gasped. "How could you know?" He was too surprised to remember to swing back, but managed to back away sufficiently that both his opponents were within sight.

Just because Chapaev hadn't seen the Watchers, that didn't mean they weren't present. Methos had only heard a few snatches of conversation when he had been at headquarters this morning and was mostly taking a shot in the dark. He managed to hide his relief at hitting target and replied, "A five thousand year old man has to have a few tricks in order to survive."

The first traces of fear started to appear on Chapaev's face. Methos might not be quite as skilled a swordsman as he was, but the ancient Immortal was extremely devious and more than good enough to defeat him if his attention stayed divided. Amanda wasn't really attacking in earnest, so Chapaev concentrated on his elder opponent, though still careful not to let her get behind him again.

Amanda realized that their original strategy wasn't working. Not having to defend herself against attacks, she was free to observe Chapaev closely as he fought. When he looked at her at all, he was watching only her sword. Amanda smiled as she stuck her foot out instead.

Methos stepped back and Chapaev tried to follow, but lost his balance and ended up impaling himself on the elder Immortal's blade. Amanda's killing stroke sliced open a

nice gash on her partner's sword arm, but the flood of relief that crossed his adrenaline filled system drowned out any sensation of pain.

Pulling his sword from the now headless body, Methos managed to stagger back the few steps needed for it to fall lifeless to the ground. The standard lightning that accompanied a Quickening soon surrounded Amanda, filling her with more power than she dreamed possible. While most of the impressive display missed him, Methos could feel the deceased Immortal's escaping life force all around and through him. Chapaev's Quickening was so powerful that Methos managed to pick up more energy from just a fraction of the overflow than he had from many Quickenings that had been his alone.

Amanda woke up in an unfamiliar bedroom. The state of the art home computer looked somewhat out of place among the ancient books that surrounded it. But Methos was a scholar, no matter what age he was living in, and the mix seemed appropriate to him.

Spotting an empty champagne bottle and beer mug on the floor beside the bed, Amanda guessed them as the source of her mild headache. She groaned. It had been ages since she had last had a hangover, even a mild one. Half a bottle of champagne didn't seem like enough, but then again she couldn't remember having anything with it and her stomach rumbled its agreement.

That didn't seem very sensible, but Chapaev's Quickening was the largest she had ever received and her third in one day on top of it. Her thinking probably wasn't all that clear even before she started with the alcohol. Methos should have been in better shape, though. He had only had one Quickening and a comparatively small one at that. But then again, he had managed to find his way home, so he probably was in better

shape. For that matter, they must have managed to pick up the champagne en route. The fact that they were drinking it out of beer mugs implied that it was something Methos didn't normally keep in stock.

Finally, Amanda turned her attention to the man lying in bed next to her. The mythical eldest Immortal looked amazingly peaceful and vulnerable in his sleep. He was also the only Immortal left in the world, aside from herself. Even though she had no use for the Prize, Amanda still couldn't help noticing what a tempting target Methos made at the moment.

No! What was she thinking? Methos was her friend! Amanda couldn't remember how she got here or if they had done anything other than get drunk, but that didn't change the fact that Methos had trusted Amanda enough to invite her into his bed. How could she even consider taking his head now? She shivered.

When Methos woke up, he could feel Amanda's fear. Obviously she was afraid of him and wanted to kill him before he was awake enough to defend himself properly. With effort, he pushed aside the Gathering inspired impulse. It was more logical to assume that Amanda was afraid of herself because she didn't really want to kill him. She didn't have even his meager skill at detecting and resisting the influence of the force that ruled all Immortals.

"It's not you. It's the Gathering. We can resist it," Methos soothed. Amanda looked at him pleadingly and he reached out to touch her. Gradually, they turned the fatal attraction they had for each other into an attraction of a different kind.

Amanda was every bit as good as Methos had fantasized. Of course, she had been refining her techniques over the course of eleven hundred years. While Methos had never tried to become an expert, over the course of his five millennia, he had managed to pick up a few tricks that impressed even

the infamous seductress.

They had just finished when a shot rang out. It hit Methos in the back, causing him to topple out of bed. Amanda rolled to the floor on the other side, narrowly dodging a second bullet as she made herself a moving target, albeit a naked and unarmed one. The lack of a third shot from the stunned Watchers indicated that her nudity might actually be an advantage as she looked to rectify her other condition.

Both swords had been dumped in a haphazard pile of clothing near the doorway, beginning an erratic path to the bed. Amanda couldn't remember whether this was due to a carelessness born of too many Quickenings and too much champagne or a slight paranoia about the Gathering making them kill each other. Whichever it was, it had been a stupid move, leaving the weapons out of reach of the Immortals and practically under the feet of the intruding Watchers.

On the floor, Methos had managed to fight off the pain of the wound and his headache sufficiently to remain conscious. He had even managed to put the extra energy gained yesterday to good use, applying his limited skill at quickening manipulation to concentrate as much energy as he could on his injury.

By the time he had recovered enough to be able to sit up, Amanda had crossed the room and was engaging the Watchers in unarmed combat. They still had guns, but she was moving too much for a clear shot, which made the risk of hitting each other in the close quarters too high.

Methos debated over whether he ought to get up now or wait until his back and chest stopped hurting. Then one of the Watchers grabbed his sword off the floor. A seductive voice whispered that if he just sat there and did nothing, he would win without having to commit the gruesome act himself. He refused to give in to it. "Stop!" He rose to his feet. "If you kill one of us, the other

one becomes invincible. Isn't that what you're trying to avoid?"

The male Watchers found Methos' naked body significantly less interesting than Amanda's, but his words caught their attention. "So we'll move you apart and kill both of you separately."

The ancient Immortal knew that wouldn't work. Their plan might not give him the Prize, but once Amanda was dead, he'd be close enough to be able to escape the Watchers. Both the knowledge itself and his acquisition of it seemed to defy logical explanation, but Methos didn't have time to figure it out now. "Why are you doing this? Did we look like we were trying to kill each other?"

The Watchers looked over the two nude Immortals, though they paid more attention to the female one. Finally their spokesman looked back to Methos. "No, but you've killed your lovers before."

"Only in self defense," Methos protested automatically, regretting the words the instant they left his mouth. From the betrayed look in Amanda's eyes, he knew that he would never be able to retract them.

How close to the edge Amanda considered herself to be wasn't obvious to the mortals. But the leader of the group sternly reminded himself that he couldn't afford to have doubts and raised his gun.

Methos dove forward, the bullet passing harmlessly over his head. Amanda ducked as well, giving the Watcher holding Methos' sword a shove as she snatched up her own weapon.

Watcher training covered the fact that swords were the weapon of choice for Immortals who wanted to kill each other. It seemed obvious that the hand held weapon ought to be less likely to hit his friends if he missed. Unfortunately, that was the extent of the sword knowledge of the man now facing

Amanda. It didn't take long to convince him that he was greatly outmatched. The metal blade was much heavier and more difficult to wield than the Immortals made it appear. The Watcher had abandoned his gun in favor of the outdated weapon and now discarded this as well as he turned tail and fled.

The other two Watchers were attempting to shoot Methos as he approached them, but he was mobile now and already recovered from the earlier wound. One bullet winged his shoulder, but he reached the Watchers before they could do serious damage. While Methos disarmed one, Amanda ran the other through with her sword.

"Get out! Take your friend to the hospital," Methos ordered, sick of all the violence and killing.

The one Watcher still standing looked dismally at the guns lying on the floor, not quite close enough for him to be able to grab before one of the two angry Immortals caused him to regret the decision. Reluctantly, he half carried, half dragged his friend out, to follow the ancient Immortal's advice.

Methos stood in the bedroom doorway and watched them go. When he was finally satisfied that they were gone, the last of the tension caused by the fight drained from his body and he returned to sit wearily on his bed.

"This isn't going to work," Amanda said finally.

"It is possible to fight the Gathering," Methos countered. "I've been doing it for thousands of years."

"I've been doing it since yesterday! Tell me I get more than one mistake," she dared.

"I'd like to..."

"But you can't," she finished.

Methos didn't try to deny it. There didn't seem much point in lying when he knew Amanda wouldn't believe his words. Amanda was his friend, but there was only so far he was willing to go to keep it that way. If she went for his head, he'd have to defend himself. Last time it had just been a misunderstanding and he'd stopped her without killing her. Next time... If there was a next time, he'd have to kill her or there *would* be a time after that.

"Look, I'm sorry it didn't work out. Really I am." Amanda started gathering up her clothing and putting it on. "I'll..." She'd what? Call? Write? See him again? "Thank you for preserving my life. Unfortunately there isn't anything I can do to repay you except do my best not to take yours. For that we need to stay away from each other. Since you're out of the Watchers, you won't be able to use them to find me..."

"I don't need the Watchers. If I want to find you, I will," Methos replied quietly, the words neither hope nor threat, but simple statement of fact.

Amanda looked at him, realizing the truth of what he said and that it applied in reverse or even if neither of them wanted it to. The Gathering wasn't done with them yet. "I guess this isn't forever then. Until we meet again..."

Methos watched her go, knowing that her plan to distance themselves from each other was counterproductive, but unable to stop her. It was physical closeness that protected them from the Watchers and emotional closeness that protected them from each other. Unfortunately, he had no way to convince Amanda of that. Giving a sigh, Methos looked around the room, wondering how many of his belongings he could successfully hide from the Watchers and if any of them were really worth the effort.

Unicorn Dreams, issue #3

March 8, 1999: Ave, Regina!

(<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Hollow/1970/uni/ud03.html>)

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Salutations!

Imagine my surprise to get *Interregnum* #29 after more than a year of no news! (I had even forgotten that I had a 'zine which hadn't been circulated yet!) It's good to see that IR is back in business--my continuing sympathies to Pete, my thanks and best wishes to Kiralee.

In May 1998, I acquired a GeoCities homestead ("*Timotheos's Traumhaus*," <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Hollow/1970/>) so that I would have a place to post material related to my various gaming projects as well as posting sundry other writings (and to get practice puttering with HTML, of course). With IR in limbo, I decided that any future 'zines I wrote would be published on my web site. I've written and posted the first two issues of *Unicorn Dreams*, which continues my old *Scribbling Unicorn* 'zine in electronic form. Now that IR is functioning again, I am writing this third issue of UD for publication both on my web page and in IR. I will continue to subscribe to IR, but I'm out of the habit of writing specifically for it, so I doubt I'll be sending in another UD to Kiralee. I hope that you Gentle Readers won't hold that against me, and will be sufficiently interested to watch for new issues of my 'zine to appear on my site.

The index for "The Scriptorium" page ([.../1970/uni/index.html](http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Hollow/1970/uni/index.html)) lists the contents of my two paper 'zines for IR (*Songs from Y'ha-nthlei* and *The Scribbling Unicorn*). Some articles which appeared in IR have been loaded on my web pages (albeit many in edited form), and I have inserted links to those pages where applicable. "The Scriptorium" also indexes my *Unicorn Dreams* 'zine (including this issue). The contents of a typical issue of UD will include:

- **Alternate Realities:** LARP events I've attended and the status of my own projects.
- **Arcadayn Journal:** Notes on my "Adventures in Arcadayn" GURPS campaign (started November 1998).
- **The Bookshelf:** My recent/current reading list.
- **Carolingian Chronicles:** SCA news and events I've attended.
- **Traumhaus Update:** What's new on my web pages since last issue. This will be a separate page so that you can ignore it if you wish to. (This issue doesn't have a TU; I'll catch up in issue #4.)
- **Colophon:** Posting data and legalese.

Life Since IR#28

It's been more than a year since I wrote TSU#6, and it's been a very busy time. There's too much for me to cover in any detail, but here's a quick overview of 1998-1999:

February 1998: I moved to my current address in Somerville.

March: I attended InterCon 13, my first all-LARP convention. I played in "Mont Saint Michel" and "The Uncivilized Guest," and helped write and GM the Build-Your-Own-Game, "Miskatonic Regional Elementary School." I have a very short blurb about MRES on my LARP page ([.../1970/gmlarp.html](http://www.geocities.com/1970/gmlarp.html)); the official MSM page is at <http://www.tiac.net/users/sdavid/msm>; and you can find out more about InterCon and the Interactive Literature Foundation at <http://www.ilinfo.org>.

May: I began my GeoCities page. My sister and brother-in-law, Carol and Kurt Emmert, had their first child, Emily Lucile, making me an uncle.

June: I joined my roommate David's AD&D campaign. I have very recently added some pages about my characters in this game to my web pages ([.../1970/dnd/](http://www.geocities.com/1970/dnd/)).

June-July: I tried to run *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*, but the party imploded and we had to abandon the game. At about the same time, I hit some serious obstacles with my "Cthulhu 2000 AD" GURPS campaign (party cohesion problems, among others), so I decided to call an indefinite hiatus to give my hurting brain a rest. I did a little much-needed work on a neglected LARP project, and started revamping some background on an old fantasy world I wanted to resurrect. My Cthulhu players had expressed some interest in a pure-fantasy GURPS game, so I decided that I would drop the Cthulhu game in order to prepare for this new campaign. (My "Adventures in Arcadain" pages are located at [.../1970/arc/](http://www.geocities.com/1970/arc/))

September: I attended a SCA demo at Felding, and played in the LARP, "Hitchhiker's Guide: B Ark." See issue #1 of *Unicorn Dreams* for write-ups of these two events.

October: Another SCA event: Coronation at Falling Leaves. I proposed to my girlfriend, Erika Little, on October 11, and she accepted. See *Unicorn Dreams* #1 (which I published 10/30) for more; also see my Christmas letter ([.../1970/xmas98.html](http://www.geocities.com/1970/xmas98.html)) for more about Erika.

November: I helped GM the second run of "Mont Saint Michel," held at MIT. My "Arcadain" campaign began actual play, with a "prelude" session for two of the players (see *Unicorn Dreams* #2 for a short write-up).

December: I wrote my first annual Christmas letter (see link above). *Unicorn Dreams* #2 has some notes about the Mistletoe Ball (an SCA event) and my Christmas vacation.

January 1999: "Arcadain" started a semi-regular schedule; I will try to catch up on the campaign journal next issue. I published *Unicorn Dreams* #2 on 1/11.

February: I belatedly wrote to C.S. Lewis's estate about using Narnia for my "By the Lion's Mane" LARP. I have put that project aside until I hear something definite from them, and Erika and I plan to do some more work on our "Caravanserai" game while I'm waiting.

March: Erika's maid of honor, Shawna Adams, will be baking our wedding cake as her gift to us. She did a practice run with the recipe this month, and we invited friends over to help dispose of all that yummy cake.

The Near Future

March 1999: I will be attending InterCon 14 on March 12-14. I will write about the con in a later issue of UD, because I don't think I will have time to do so this issue and still get it to Kiralee in time for IR#30.

June 1999: My roommates (fiancee Erika, friends Shawna and Dave) and I will probably be moving again this summer.

August 1999: Erika's & my wedding will be held August 27 in Estes Park, CO. We don't have an engagement/wedding page set up yet, but we'll be working on one as we continue to make plans and get the information out to our guests.

Comments on IR#29

I've started to look at the web pages of the IR contributors who have them. I'm a little preoccupied preparing for InterCon right now, but I plan to take a longer look and offer some feedback later.

The Guest: The Cthulhu campaign PCs spent a fair amount of time in the Dreamlands (about half?), but the campaign didn't last long enough to make use of all of the rules I presented in TSU #5. The Dream Travel rules and a few other files relating to that campaign are now located on my web pages (<http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Hollow/1970/cth/>). I need to tweak some of the Dream Travel rules to bring them more in parallel with Astral Projection, but it's no longer a big priority.

The Swashbuckling Mage & the Dancing Priestess: I would like to meet the two of you sometime, esp. since I live even closer to you now! Friday nights aren't a good time for me to game, though--too many friends have movie/anime nights then, and if I'm at all short of sleep during the week, I feel it most then.

RE: my Cthulhu campaign: The disembodied males happened by chance. The two oldest PCs (the cat-lady and astral gent) were played by a couple; I don't think their PCs were romantically inclined, but their OOC flirting made it hard to tell sometimes (and yes, they got teased mercilessly about that confusion).

Fear the Wrath of Rocket Bat: 1920-1936 would be more accurate for HPL's "active" dates; he died in 1937. I'm not sure if you're enough of a Lovecraft fan to be interested in this, but I have just finished S.T. Joshi's *H.P. Lovecraft: A Life* (Necronomicon Press, 1996). It's a very thorough, detailed look at Lovecraft's life, with much attention paid to the development of his aesthetics and world-view, and it includes short capsule bios of most of his major correspondents. The final chapter briefly summarizes how HPL and his works have fared since his death (imitations, media adaptations,

literary reputation, etc.). I will try to write a more detailed review for a future issue of UD.

Tales from the Electric Underground: I have mixed feelings about "The Gates of Hell Should Not Prevail...." While I applaud your efforts in bridging the gaps between two Chaosium systems, you seem to be reinterpreting the Mythos in much the same way as did August Derleth, whose devout Catholic upbringing wouldn't accept the Mythos as Lovecraft wrote it. Lovecraft's world-view was atheistic and rather nihilistic; the heroism displayed in his stories (and in his own life) is defined by the ability to survive (even thrive) in spite of the apparent pointlessness of existence. I won't naysay your right to play the game as you see fit, but I hope that you and your players are fully aware of just how much these new rules change the fundamentally axioms of the milieu.

I acquired a copy of *Delta Green* for Christmas '97. I think that if I ever ran Cthulhu by CoC rules, I would use DG for my campaign setting--it's a fascinating update from the time of Lovecraft's writings. The government agency profiles alone are worth much of the book's cost.

Firestarter: RE: comments to David Dunham: Marriage is a form of partnership that has a strong appeal for me, and I have some idea of the amount of commitment it requires to make it work. I consider myself very lucky that I've found someone whose attitude and commitment matches my own pretty closely. Wish us luck!

RE: comments to Scott Shafer about organized religion: Ever come across C.S. Lewis's phrase "watchful dragons"? IMHO, religion should be something one seeks out of a personal need, not a mandatory code of conduct. However, I do have a great deal of respect for those people who genuinely devote their lives to facilitating others' life-journeys.

Colophon

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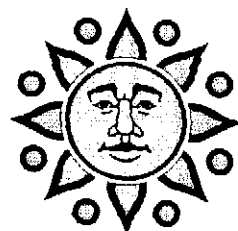


Fear the Wrath of Rocket Bat!

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Issue #5
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Thanks very much for reviving *Interregnum*, Kiralee and Joe! It will be a challenge maintaining the high standards Pete set, but from what I've seen, you guys have the enthusiasm and the talent to do it. And let me also congratulate you on your impeccable timing! ☺ I'd have basically been a passive subscriber if *Interregnum* had been coming out last year. I've been working on my doctoral dissertation in ecology. I've just finished the third draft, and my advisor has taken it to the Canary Islands with him. I can't schedule my defense until after he gets back, but expect to be job-hunting this summer. At the moment, I'm playing in a *CyberPunk* campaign with elements of *The X-Files* and *Delta Green* run by Nate Nolan, about which I may write more for my next 'zine. On the other hand, I might write about my weird ideas for a game involving a modern setting with secret fantasy elements. Or perhaps something else. But in the meantime, you must make do with a Con report (because I've done very little thinking about anything except my dissertation this year) and some topical stuff.

Suggestions for Forming a Gaming Group

Don't start campaigns with strangers! I won't go repeating the horror stories, but most of us have had some bad experience and you can't just throw someone out of a campaign. But as everyone here knows, gaming is a social thing, and you'll want to make friends with your fellow gamers. Most of us can't make friends with just everybody (sad, but true). So you want to get to know someone as a person before you invite him or her into your group. The other consideration is finding people with a compatible style of gaming. I have a real problem with hack 'n slash gamers, for example, and am going to be leery of inviting any into any of my campaigns.

So, how does one get acquainted with gamers without playing in the same campaign with them? Well, conventions

and game clubs are good places to make friends with people and see if their gaming style works well with yours. Every university I've been to has a role-playing club: Williams has WARP, Cambridge has CUDADS, and the Universities of Minnesota and Wisconsin have chapters of RPSIG at several of their campuses. Starting a club takes a lot of time: finding meeting space, recruiting GMs and players by advertising at game stores, book stores and universities, and keeping the membership together with a newsletter. A good format for groups that meet every couple of months is to have a bunch of one-shot games to let people get acquainted and to allow GMs to play-test scenarios and test systems, much like a small convention.

Forming a Gaming Group (cont. from p. 1)

Once you've got a bunch of people who want to game together, at least one of whom is willing to GM, and a place to game, you'll need to settle on a system, setting, and other conventions. For the most part, the starting set-up is up to the GM, but I prefer to deal with a group where the players are willing to contribute something to the campaign. The GM ought to have more than a generic fantasy world, a setting with a little more in the way history,



geography and interesting people and wildlife than a 10' by 10' corridor full of wandering monsters. When I GM, I request that players give me at least a paragraph of character background. The most I've gotten is eleven pages, but most people average a side. The players can develop enemies, friends, and property (or debts) for their characters or make connections with features that are already part of the GM's setting (some rules sets make this an integral part of character creation).

Some groups have multiple people GM a campaign (a troupe-style campaign). This takes a lot of the strain off of individuals, but can result in shallow plots and a rather bland campaign world unless all the GMs are willing to put in a little extra work to develop on each other's ideas. Another decision is how often your group should meet: I recommend every other week because that allows people who only have time to game once a week be involved in more than one campaign.

1999 Con of the North Report

Con of the North is a small (400-500-person) convention run by a group of volunteers in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. I've been one of those volunteers since the first Con of the North (CotN) in 1992. I've also played in and run some great games there. I've been on the Board of Directors twice: once as head of Programming and once as head of Operations. This year, I was just an ordinary volunteer. I'd helped with mailings and so forth before the convention and planned to volunteer onsite as well.

We were at a new site this year, the Ramada at I-94 and White Bear Lake Road, but I had no trouble seeing it from the highway. I arrived too late to help the

Operations committee to set up the registration area, so I put up signs, which gave me a chance to look around the hotel. We had much of the first floor, both large function rooms and individual hotel rooms and suites, which was all stretched along a single winding corridor and a few rooms on other floors. I ran into several people I now only see at conventions, either because they've moved away from the Twin Cities or because they're ordinarily too busy to game. I also looked at the areas being set up for various kinds of games: miniatures, card tournaments, role-playing, computers, and live-action role-playing.

CotN of the North Report (cont. from p. 2)

After the signs went up, I checked out the vendors. Mostly it was *Magic* cards and board games, but there were a couple of people doing Tarot readings and selling tambourines, and John Nephew of Atlas Games had some stuff he was remaindering for \$5 a volume. He'd been planning on selling *Vampire: the Masquerade* rulebooks (1st edition softcovers) to the Russians back when it looked like they'd develop a consumer economy (or any economy, for that matter). So I picked up one of those, a *Cyberpunk* supplement, and a couple of *Ars Magica* supplements.

Registration started to get busy at that point, so I went down there to hand out tickets (only for game sign-up; CotN is too little to get away with charging for games) and answer questions. The RPGA had turned out in force, and some of their members wouldn't try other events once RPGA games had filled up. ☹ Once the 8 PM games started, things quieted down and I fled the registration desk for the volunteer party. The inimitable Jeff Tidball and Peter Hentges were presiding over the sodas and chips. After a snack, I wandered over to the *Midi-Maze* room. Jim Beecher had networked twelve Atari computers together by their midi ports (actually more, but only twelve worked at any given time). He then put on a big hat and set up a game on the network that involved each player being a happy face that hunted the happy faces of other players through a 3-D maze and shot them. I got roped into a tournament and got whopped.

I ended up going home to sleep but I was back by 7:45 the next morning because I wanted to play in an *Amber* game that Linda Duncan had recommended to me. It was just as well because when I got there, a bunch of distressed gamers were huddled

around the registration desk. The cashbox and pre-registration list had been taken away and there wasn't a volunteer in sight. So, I called the Director of Operations, told him what was going on, and got permission to hand out tickets. So I had gamers filling out registration forms and handed out tickets for 8 AM games as fast as I could. Another volunteer noticed the situation and hurried over, which made it possible for me to make it over to my 8 AM game.



The *Amber* game, "Uncle Fox Returns" run by Jim Holthaus, was a long one, but lots of fun. The other players were all people I knew and good fun. Most of the characters we came up with were self-centered kids who refused to take things seriously at first. But the plot started off as an intriguing mystery and became suspenseful. Eventually, we were all involved. But the big room full of role-players that we were in became very noisy toward the middle of the game (especially once Mike Miller's *Paranoia* game got going). So we went and talked to the folks at the registration desk and they assigned us one of the hotel rooms to finish the games in. I'll definitely have to go back for the sequel next year.

Con of the North Report (cont. from p. 3)

After eight hours of role-playing, I was pretty frazzled. The hotel's concession stand was pretty affordable (except the soda, which they reduced in price by Sunday). So I ate a slice of pizza and wandered around. The other computer room had a PC network and people were playing *Quake*, *Starcraft*, and *Age of Empires*. I took pictures of all the cute volunteer babies at the Con (there were three). Dave Ackerman showed me his sketches of the very cute animal-people player characters for his game that evening, which I decided to play in. I also took pictures of the incredible Victorian costumes and spiffy masks of the players in Elizabeth Sloan and Gerald Dagel's *Castle Faulkenstein* Royal Masked Ball.



Dave's game "Nor Snow, Nor Dark of Night" was a *GURPS* fantasy game with lots of combat and only a single human character (played by my friend Albert Choy) in the whole game. I also got to game with Roadkill, who's a wonderful role-player and

thoroughly in his element as a minotaur officer. We had lots of fun clobbering aboriginal wolf-people and finally coming up with a peace treaty (although Roadkill deserves the credit for that one). My character was an otter inventor who had a napalm-dispensing hopping robot that was a great help to us. It set a forest on fire during a night ambush by wolf-people that allowed us to see the wolf people and shoot them full of crossbow quarrels. Unfortunately, we were blind-tired by midnight, so we really weren't as scary as we could have been.

I was back at Con of the North before 9 AM on Sunday. It occurred to me that though our GOH Ken Hite's games had all filled up in pre-registration, people often didn't bother to turn up for Sunday morning games. So I recruited Roger Streeter, a terrific role-player and a friend I see too little of, for Ken's *Alternate Earth's* game and wandered over myself. I'd enjoyed the *GURPS Alternate Earths* that Craig Neumeier had run for our gaming club. Ken's scenario followed much the same plan. The PCs were a team of operatives dispatched from a more advanced version of our Earth who were sent to alternate realities to make sure that they couldn't travel to ours and do it harm (purely defensive, I assure you!). Instead of the *GURPS* rules set, Ken used *Chaosium Lite*, and his PC operatives were a somewhat harder-edged bunch than Craig generally had us play: good practice for the afternoon game as it turned out. We were sent to a nasty little world that had never developed democracy, and only in the 1980s were monarchic nationalism and mercantilism beginning to crumble. Roger didn't get to hijack a zeppelin until the very end.

I wandered about and socialized for a couple more hours, then turned up to Nate Nolan's *Feng Shui* game, "Maximum Impact

Can of the North Report (cont. from p. 4) Force". The PCs were a bunch of maverick cops and ex-cops out for justice at any price, a la the tackiest Hong Kong action film you can think of. There were loads of wacky stunts and police brutality. Nate is just the guy to run *Feng Shui* because he knows exactly how much slack to give the role-players and when to push them. At one

point, we were questioning some captured bad guys in an interrogation room at a Hong Kong police station. They were clawing at the one-way mirror shrieking: "Somebody heelllp us!" By the time we had defeated the master villain, Operations had already dismantled everything and it was time to go home.

Comments on *Interregnum* 29

The Guest #20: I missed both MageCon and GenCon last year because of the dissertation. ☹ But I'm making vague plans to go to MageCon North this year. • *Magic: the Gathering* seems to have levelled off, but all the tournaments at Con of the North filled. • Nice reviews. I rarely play and don't remember ever having GMed it *Call of Cthulhu*, but I've read much of the mythos and include horror elements in my games, so perhaps I should check it out.

The Electric Underground #14.5: I started with the digest-sized *Traveller* by GDW and have most of the supplements. It was the first game I ran after AD&D. I recently picked up *GURPS Traveller* but have had no time to play with it (that dissertation again).

* "Fear the Wrath of Rocket Bat" was coined during a *Castle Faulkenstein* campaign. I had a Faerie character with "exceptional" ranking in Etherealness, a statistic which deals with a Faerie's ability to fly, change shape, and pass through solid objects. According to the original rules, my character could turn into a 4 oz. bat and fly through a window and 200 MPH without breaking it. The GM (my friend Nate Nolan mentioned above) and I had come up with some other rules changes (involving vulnerability to iron) that balanced him out

(along with his demented background), but he was obviously pretty crooked. So were the other players but in different ways. This was, after all, *Castle Faulkenstein*.

The Swashbuckling Mage & the Dancing Princess #14: I'd heard some good things about *Aria*, I'll have to ask the *Cyberpunk* group about it tomorrow. Unfortunately, that \$30 pricetag on *Lachesis Passage* deters me. I've been trading in old comics recently to finance rulebook purchases. • Congrats on the raise, Kiralee.



Refugee #216: More margins, George! • Sorry to hear that the publishers didn't accept your book. • Your story grows more suspenseful. Eviane killed those marines and then didn't check out their equipment, even though she knew they had some advantage. Sure, she'd just been shot, but

Comments on *IR* 29 (cont. from p. 5)
aargh! Hope someone finds those guns and brings them back to Tomas. Those Europeans aren't loveable at all! The one-worlders are frustrating, but they are the victims, and they aren't determined to remain primitives. There was a short repeat in the Col-Lt's letter about swordswomen breaking through the marines' lines and wreaking havoc.



Scribbling Unicorn #ζ: Sick, depraved Cthulhu ilk. Bad Tim!



Notes from a Caffeine-Based Lifeform #15:

Down with tiny print! • Hilarious intro to your webgame. • Some of the pages of my Kethem chronicles were mixed up. ☹ • Who needs master villains when you've got Glorm and Sid working to bring about the end of the world just to make a buck?

Tales from the Electric Underground #15:

Sounds like your *Call of Cthulhu* games are about the battle between good and evil. I've

always found that more intriguing than the hopeless battle against evil in which the protagonists despair, go mad, and ultimately lose anyway. • "Whispering Hill" looks like an interesting and rather creepy adventure (any knights dumb enough to want to party after spending part of a night on that weird hill deserve what they get). I loved the story of the riddle contest.

Reading Companion #11: Your Glorantha chronicles are actually atmospheric. Is that a whole year's worth of deeds on the part of the PCs? • Thanks for the kind words. I find that generating background for a PC helps me to play him (or her) and the GM to understand his motivations. If motivations aren't enough to involve him in the plot, then the background may contain something to involve him more directly. • I'm intrigued by *Pendragon*, but have only played it a few times (at conventions). I obtained the rulebook by trading in old comics, but haven't had a chance to read it through (damned dissertation!).

Firestarter #12: Very good point that many sf/fantasy worlds can have arms control at some level and that the non-egalitarian ones have to! • Sorry to hear that you're having to spend some important social years in an intolerant environment. Hang in there!

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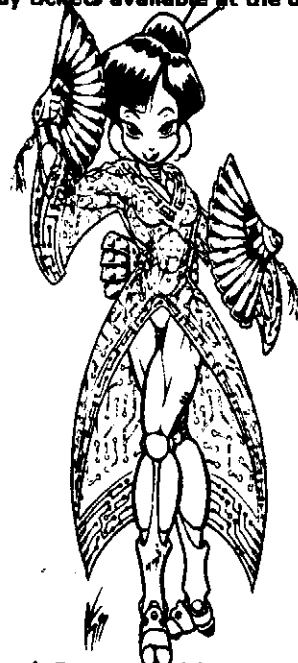
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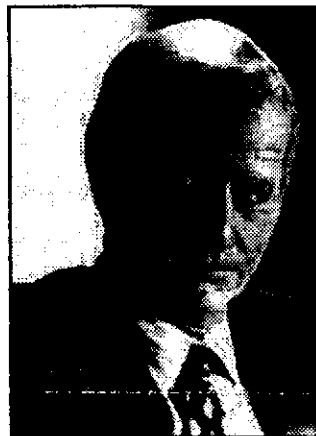
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